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this issue:
THE BEGUILING
A PATH OF STARS
THE HORDE
three new stories
by Barry
Windsor-Smith

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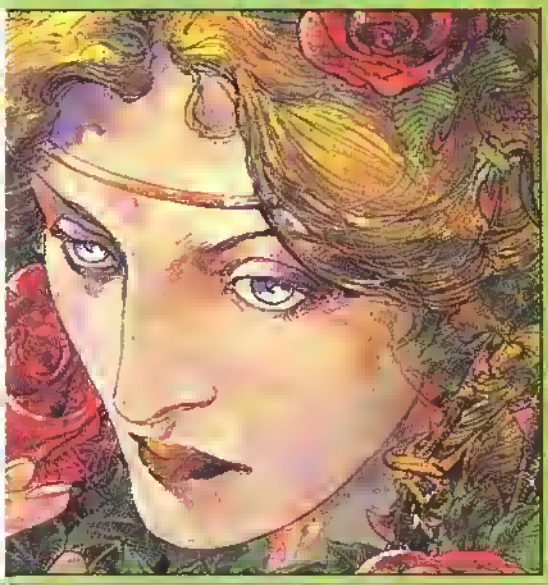

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FEBRUARY 1982 VOL. 1, NO. 16

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SYNOPSIS

Two earthmen—marine biologist *John Isaac* and submarine commander *Falco*—have been shanghaied by aliens who hunt whales across the reaches of space.

To prepare the prisoners for duty, *Captain Rotwang* turns them over to his ship's surgeons, enormous insects known as the *Xlexu*. The Xlexu strip Isaac of his skin, replacing it with a transparent membrane suited to the atmosphere within which he must now work. In addition, they join the two sides of his brain, separate in most humans, giving him the ability to generate and release an immensely powerful aura. In cryptic remarks, the Xlexu refer to the aura as Isaac's "new self" and advise him to awaken into it.

Falco has been decapitated, his body accidentally destroyed, and his intellect and emotions trapped within his head.

Rotwang has spent years seeking to destroy the great red mutant whale *Abraxas*, but when they meet and clash, it is the whale who triumphs as Rotwang's vessel burns, and most of the crew is killed. All but a few of the survivors mutiny when Rotwang's mind snaps. Eventually, he wanders off down the corridors of the giant alien space craft on which he and the few remaining loyal crewmen —Falco, Isaac's friend *Sphinx*, and the gravely injured first mate, *Staub*—have managed to stow away.

Meanwhile, Isaac, flung into Abraxas's maw during the battle, has fallen into the hands of *Loon*—one of a band of earthmen who, like Isaac, were altered by the Xlexu and tossed into the whale's belly, and who have gradually gone mad. All of them covet Isaac's aura, for in some imperfect way, they recognize it as the "self" they were all meant to find.

ABRAXAS AND THE EARTHMAN

written and illustrated
by
RICK VEITCH

©1982 Rick Veitch

AS HE IS IMMERSED IN THE SAC OF NOXIOUS FLUID, ISAAC TRIES DESPERATELY TO DUPLICATE THE PROCESS OF AWAKENING, BUT...

IT'S NO USE-- IT'S NOT WORKING!

I'M GOING TO [illegible] IN HERE!

SUDDENLY, AS IF OF ITS OWN VOLITION, HIS AURA EXPLODES OUT OF HIM--

IT SHRIEKS AND HOWLS THROUGH THE CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM OF THE GREAT RED...

UNTIL, SOMEWHERE BEYOND THE PERIMETERS OF NORMAL SPACE/TIME IT REFORMS...

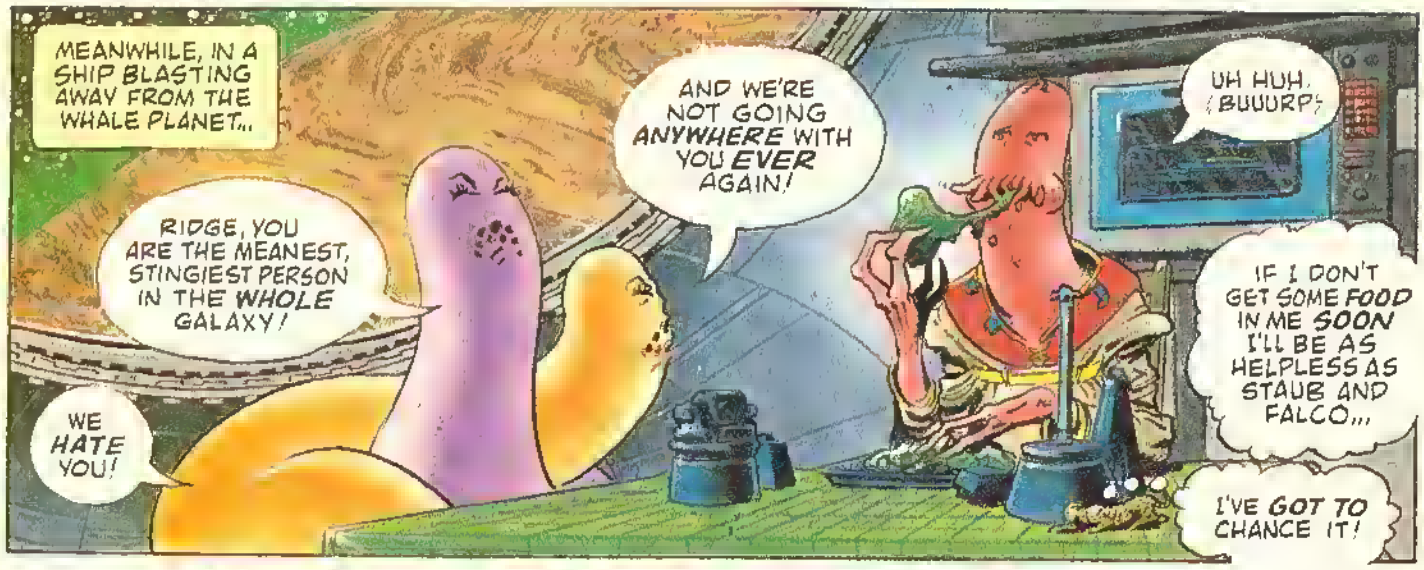
AND ONCE AGAIN, JOHN ISAAC AWAKENS INTO HIS TRUE SELF!

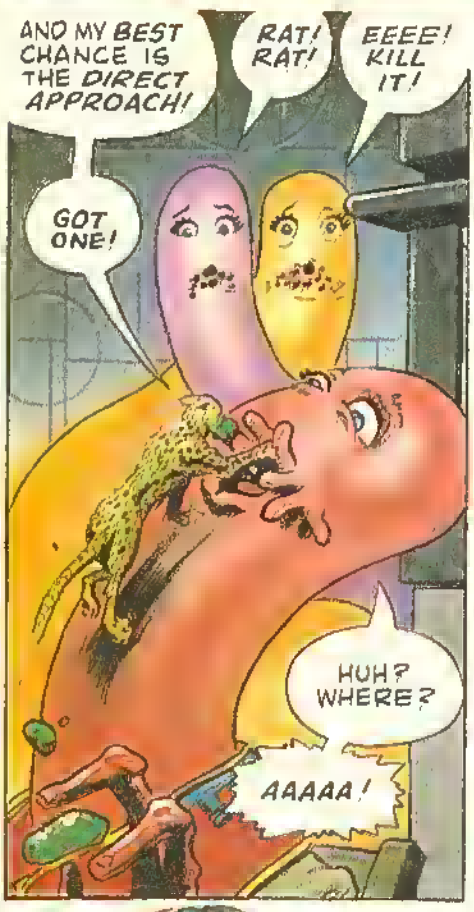
OOOH, WHAT A RIDE!

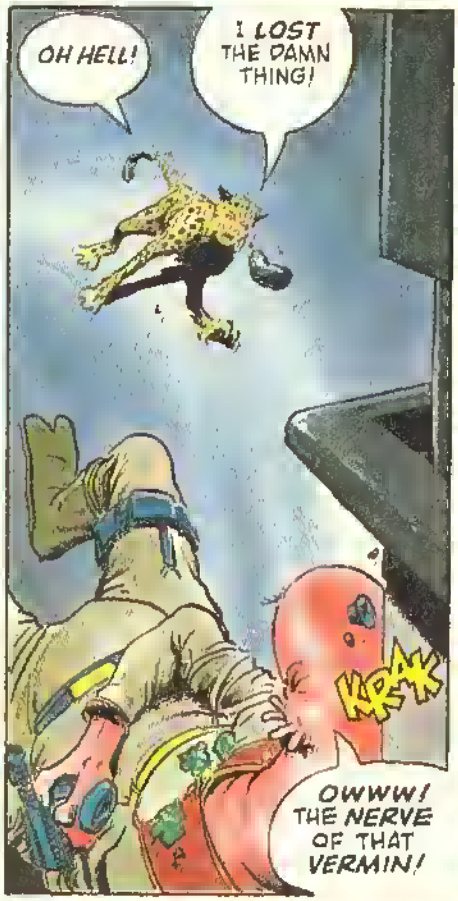
I-I SEEM TO BE FULLY FORMED NOW, YET SOMEHOW I STILL FEEL-- INCOMPLETE!

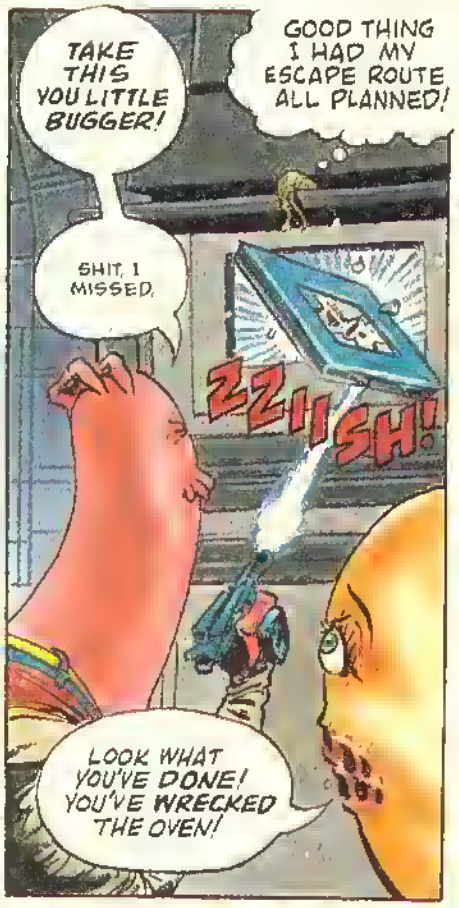
AND NOT ALONE!

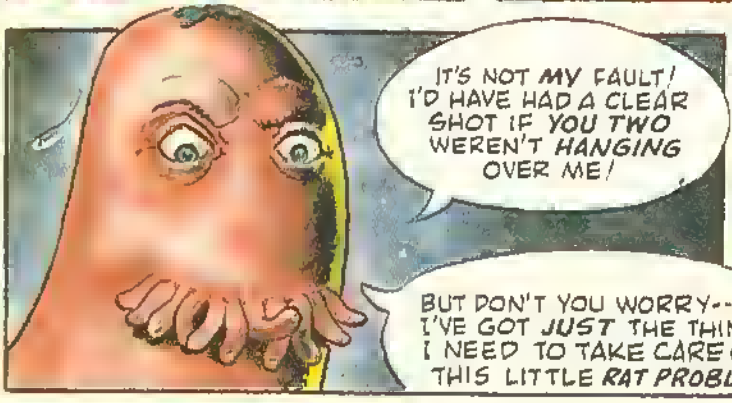
BAREEP?

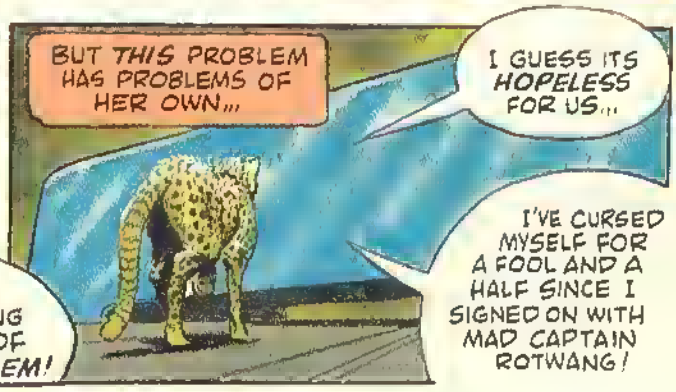

MEANWHILE, IN A SHIP BLASTING AWAY FROM THE WHALE PLANET...
RIDGE, YOU ARE THE MEANEST, STINGIEST PERSON IN THE WHOLE GALAXY!
WE HATE YOU!
AND WE'RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE WITH YOU EVER AGAIN!
UH HUH. (BUUURP)
IF I DON'T GET SOME FOOD IN ME SOON I'LL BE AS HELPLESS AS STAUB AND FALCO...
I'VE GOT TO CHANCE IT!

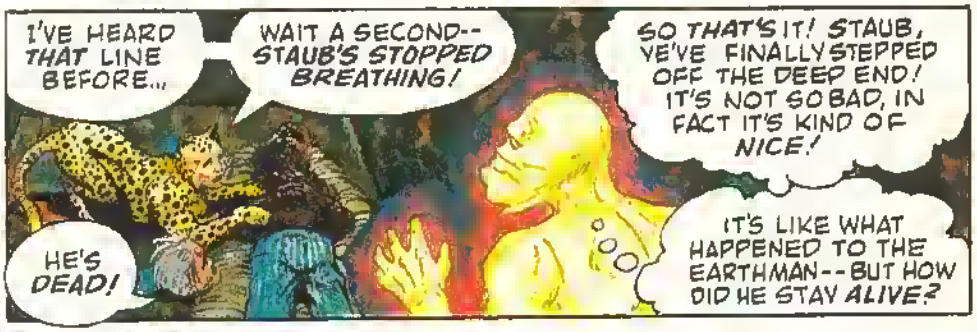

AND MY BEST CHANCE IS THE DIRECT APPROACH!
RAT! RAT!
EEEE! KILL IT!
GOT ONE!
HUH? WHERE?
AAAAA!


OH HELL!
I LOST THE DAMN THING!
KRAK
OWWW! THE NERVE OF THAT VERMIN!

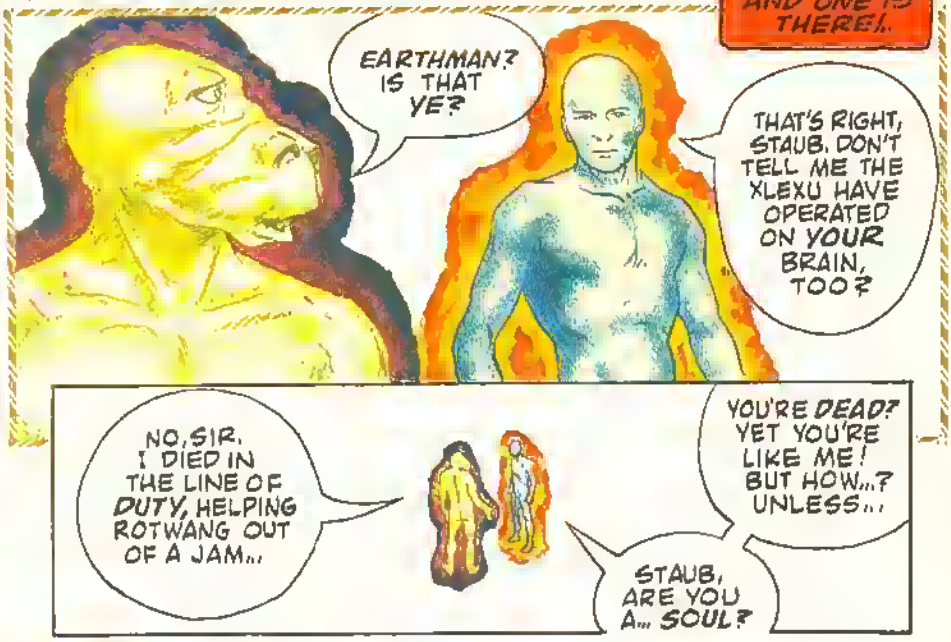

TAKE THIS YOU LITTLE BUGGER!
GOOD THING I HAD MY ESCAPE ROUTE ALL PLANNED!
SHIT, I MISSED.
ZZIISH!
LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE! YOU'VE WRECKED THE OVEN!

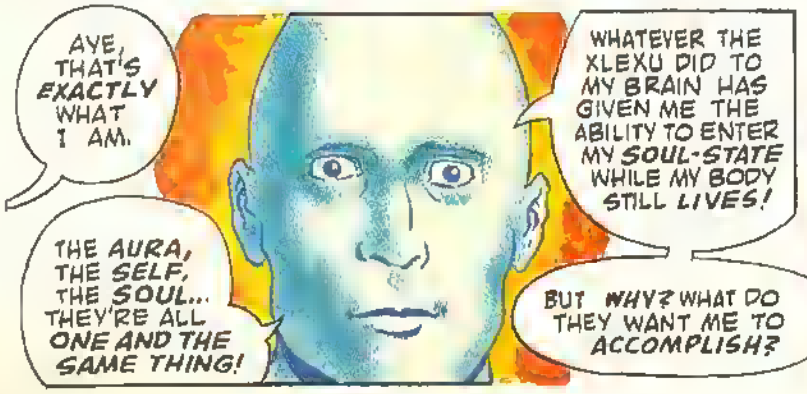

IT'S NOT MY FAULT! I'D HAVE HAD A CLEAR SHOT IF YOU TWO WEREN'T HANGING OVER ME!
BUT DON'T YOU WORRY-- I'VE GOT JUST THE THING I NEED TO TAKE CARE OF THIS LITTLE RAT PROBLEM!

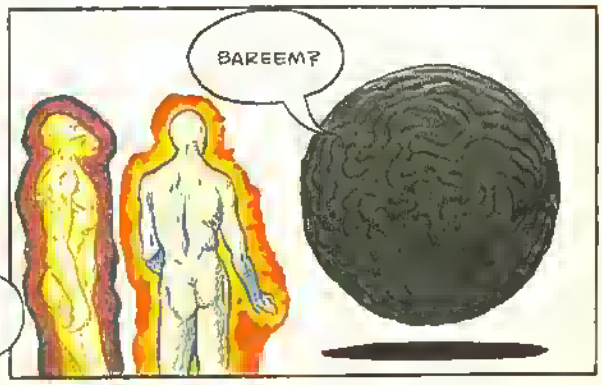

BUT THIS PROBLEM HAS PROBLEMS OF HER OWN...
I GUESS ITS HOPELESS FOR US...
I'VE CURSED MYSELF FOR A FOOL AND A HALF SINCE I SIGNED ON WITH MAD CAPTAIN ROTWANG!



STAUB IS STARTLED TO FIND THAT BEYOND THE PALE ONE ONLY HAS TO TURN ONE'S ATTENTION TOWARD A THING...

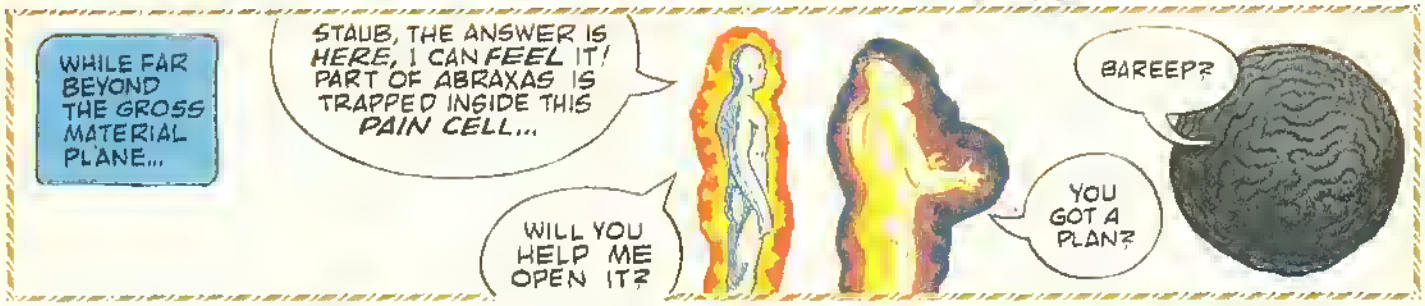


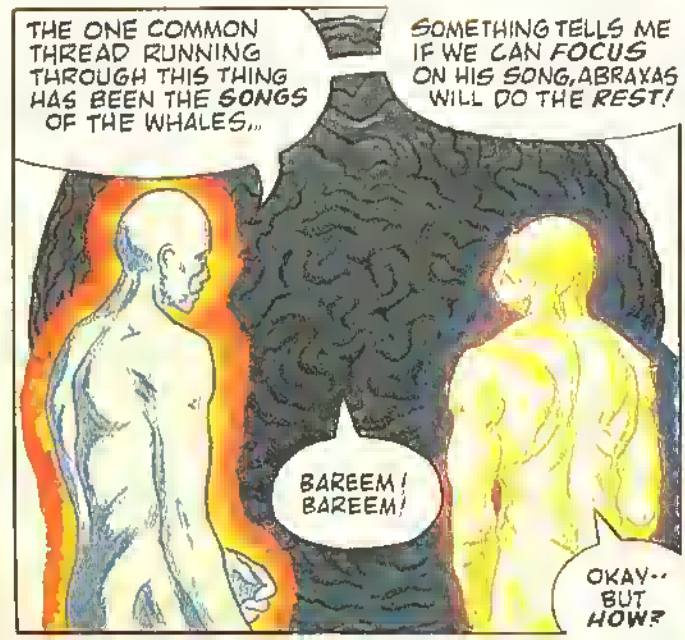


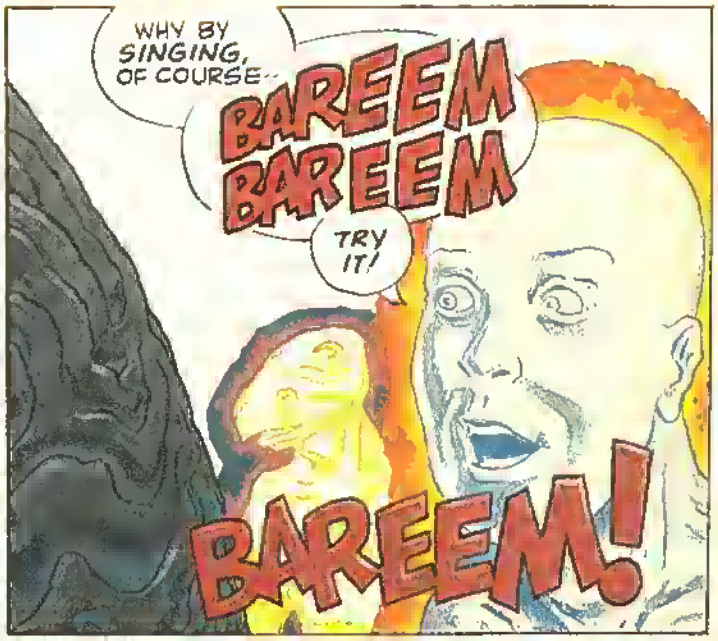


BACK ON THE SHIP, ROTWANG IS STILL MUMBLING AND STUMBLING ALONG IN HIS FULL SCALE RETREAT FROM REALITY...
...LEGEND HAS IT AS NO ORDINARY MORSEL, BUT THE VERY SOUL OF THE WHALE...
EH? F-FOOD?
IT IS HIS INATE SURVIVAL MECHANISM THAT BEGINS TO BRING HIM BACK!
FOOD-- FOOD!
BUT IT IS A WHITE-HOT FLASH OF PAIN THAT COMPLETES THE PROCESS!
WTAK
HOLO, YE BONE LEGGED IDIOT!
ARRGH! WHO--?
NEVER-SWEAT!
'AT'S RIGHT, ME BUCKO! LOOKS LIKE YOU FOLKS HOPPED A RIDE ON THE SAME TUB WE DID!
I ONLY HOPE YER PARTY MET EASIER FATES THAN MY POOR LADS...
GOOD MEN ALL, ROTWANG! JUST LIKE THE SCORES OF OTHERS WHO WENT DOWN CHASING YER MAD DREAM!
BUT IT BECAME A NIGHTMARE, DIDN'T IT? I SEEN YE! THE WHALE WON OUT AND YER MIND SNAPPED LIKE A BROKEN HARPOON LINE!
WTAK
HE BEAT YE, ROTWANG! HE BEAT YE!
NAY! NAY!
I SWEAR BY THE BLOOD OF EACH MAN LOST--I WILL YET TAKE THE RED WHALE FOR EVERY BARREL OF OIL I CAN SQUEEZE FROM HIS BLOODY CARCASS! ROTWANG ENDURES!
SO, YER SLIMY BLACK SPIRIT STILL SLITHERS WITHIN?
THEN WE MUST SEE IF WHIP CAN DO WHAT WHAT WHALE COULD NOT!
BUT FIRST A BIT OF SUSTENANCE...

EEE AAK!
SNAP!
IT WOULD SEEM FATE SPEAKS MORE ELOQUENTLY THAN EVEN YE, EH, NEVERSWEAT?
H-HELP ME...?
OF COURSE I'LL HELP YE.
I COULDN'T ALLOW YER LAST MOMENTS TO BE ANYTHING EXCEPT MEMORABLE!
YAAAGH!


WHILE FAR BEYOND THE GROSS MATERIAL PLANE...
STAUB, THE ANSWER IS HERE, I CAN FEEL IT! PART OF ABRAXAS IS TRAPPED INSIDE THIS PAIN CELL...
WILL YOU HELP ME OPEN IT?
BAREEP?
YOU GOT A PLAN?

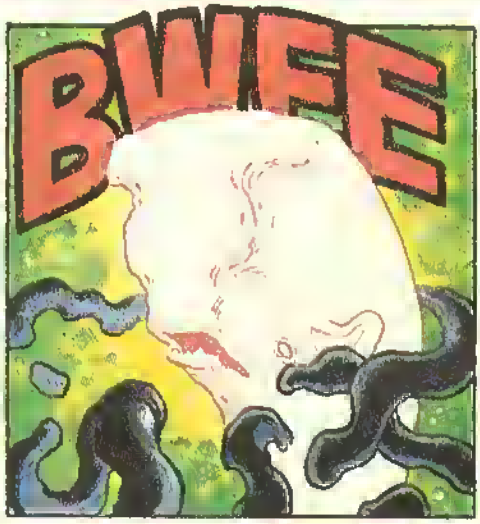

THE ONE COMMON THREAD RUNNING THROUGH THIS THING HAS BEEN THE SONGS OF THE WHALES...
SOMETHING TELLS ME IF WE CAN FOCUS ON HIS SONG, ABRAXAS WILL DO THE REST!
BAREEM! BAREEM!
OKAY-- BUT HOW?


WHY BY SINGING, OF COURSE--
BAREEM BAREEM
TRY IT!
BAREEM!

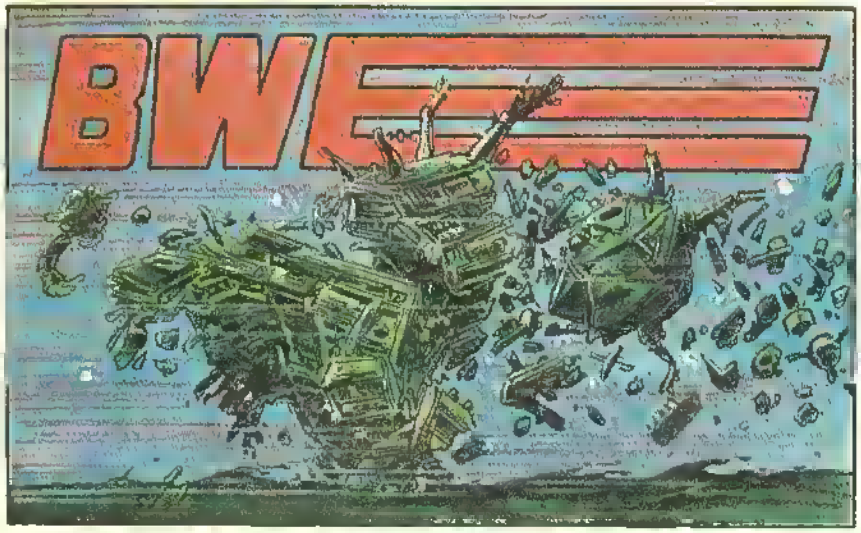
STAUB FINDS THAT THE SONG COMES EASILY TO THE PHANTOM LIPS OF HIS SOUL...

AS THE THREE MYSTICAL VOICES SYNCHRONIZE, SOMETHING *ELSE*, SOMETHING MAGNIFICENT, IS BORN...

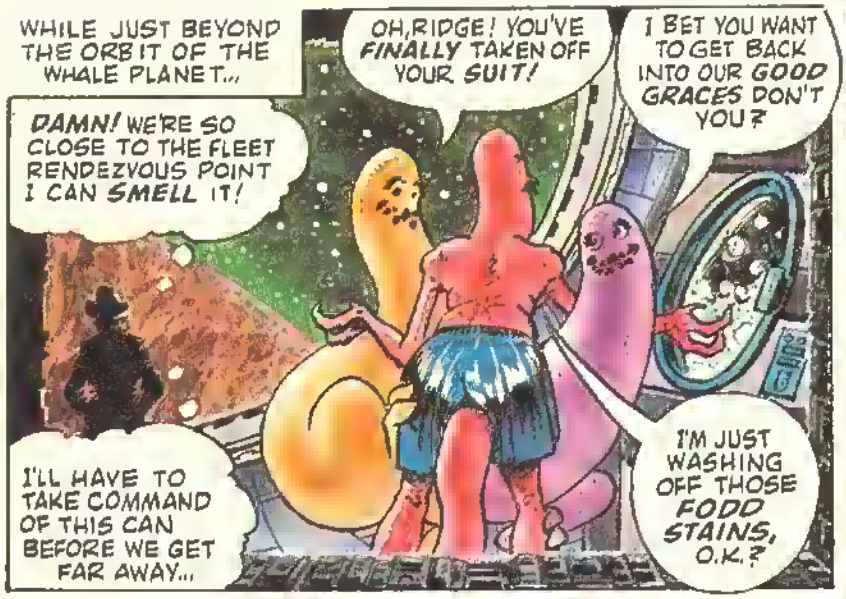
AND THE SOUL OF ABRAXAS IS FREED!



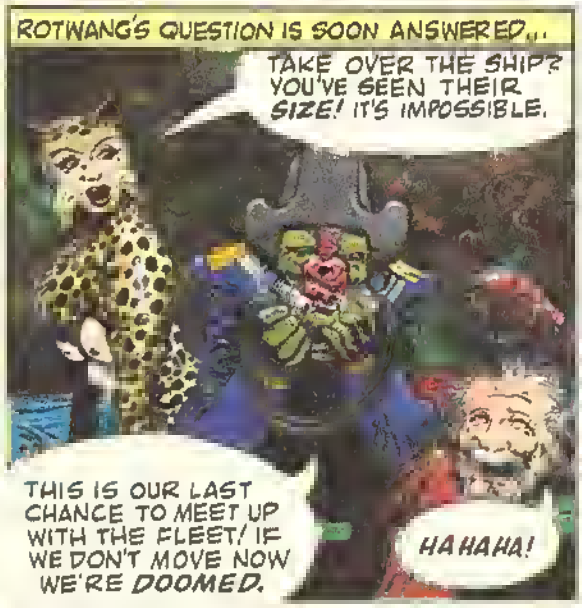
THERE IS *NOTHING* THAT CAN STAND UP TO THE CACOPHONY THAT SWEEPS ALONG THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF HIS BIO-SYSTEM...

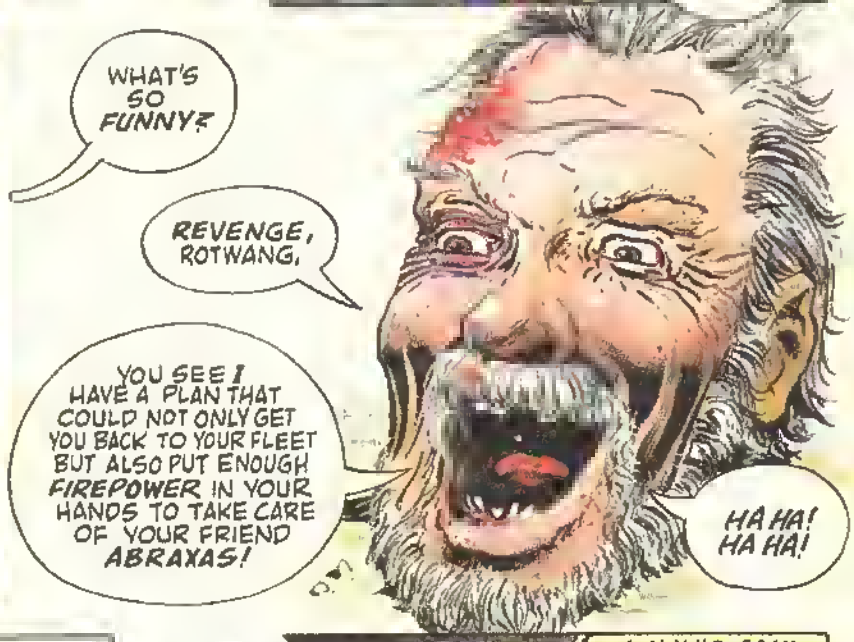


THE TIME HAS COME FOR A MUCH-NEEDED *PURGE*...


WHILE JUST BEYOND THE ORBIT OF THE WHALE PLANET...
OH, RIDGE! YOU'VE FINALLY TAKEN OFF YOUR SUIT!
I BET YOU WANT TO GET BACK INTO OUR GOOD GRACES DON'T YOU?
DAMN! WE'RE SO CLOSE TO THE FLEET RENDEZVOUS POINT I CAN SMELL IT!
I'LL HAVE TO TAKE COMMAND OF THIS CAN BEFORE WE GET FAR AWAY...
I'M JUST WASHING OFF THOSE FODD STAINS, O.K.?

EEEAGH! ANOTHER RAT!
YUUUUCK! YOU SAID YOU'D GOTTEN RID OF THEM!
BUT I SET THE TRAPS!
...I SEE NO LIMBS, NO FOLIAGE, NO GRAVITY FURNACE...
HOW AM I TO SAIL SUCH A CRAFT?

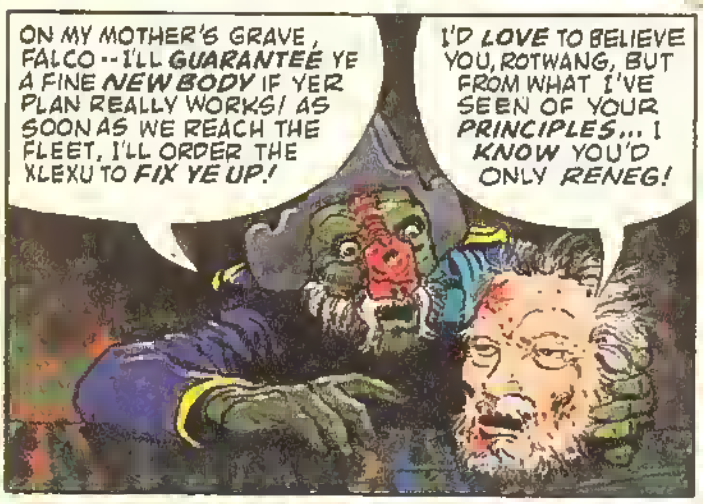

ROTWANG'S QUESTION IS SOON ANSWERED...
TAKE OVER THE SHIP? YOU'VE SEEN THEIR SIZE! IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
THIS IS OUR LAST CHANCE TO MEET UP WITH THE FLEET! IF WE DON'T MOVE NOW WE'RE DOOMED.
HAHAHA!

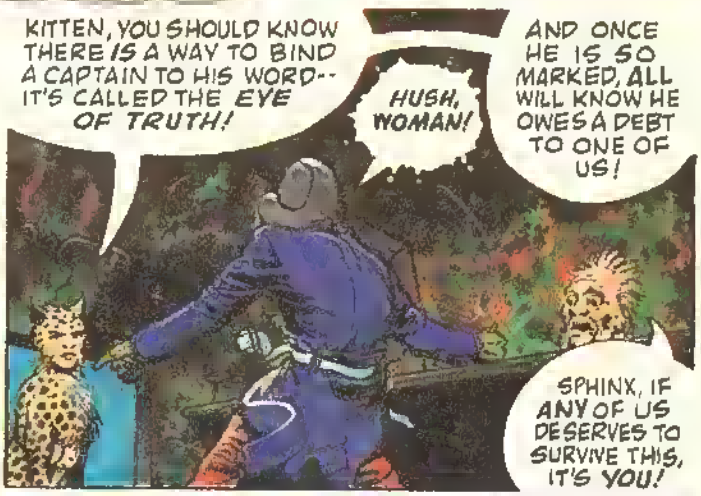

WHAT'S SO FUNNY?
REVENGE, ROTWANG.
YOU SEE I HAVE A PLAN THAT COULD NOT ONLY GET YOU BACK TO YOUR FLEET BUT ALSO PUT ENOUGH FIREPOWER IN YOUR HANDS TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR FRIEND ABRAXAS!
HA HA! HA HA!

OUT WITH IT! OR I'LL BLIND YE SURE AS YER BORN!
YOU'LL NEVER GET IT FROM ME! MAIM ME, KILL ME, GO AHEAD! I DON'T CARE ANYMORE!
AT LEAST I'LL DIE WITH THE SATISFACTION OF TAKING YOU WITH ME!

SO BE IT!... EH?
FOR YER OWN SAKE, CAP'N-- HOLD!
A MAN'S SOUL CAN ONLY CARRY THE WEIGHT OF SO MANY SUCH CRUEL ACTS...
S-STAUB? BUT YER STONE COLD DEAD, MAN! I CHECKED YER CORPSE MYSELF!?

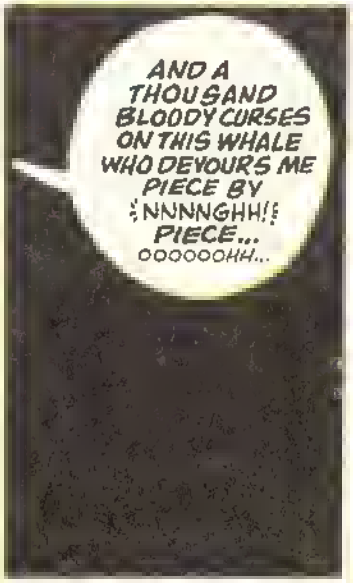
I HAD TO COME BACK TO WARN YE, CAPTAIN-- FOR I HAVE SEEN ABRAXAS IN HIS TRUE STATE!
GIVE UP THIS MAD VENGEANCE! BEFORE THE RADIANT PURITY OF THE WHALE IT IS A FOUL AND BLASPHEMOUS LITTLE THING.
SHUT UP!
SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP!
FLAIL AWAY, I AM FAR BEYOND YER REACH!
AND SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT WHAT ROTWANG REALLY SEEKS TO KILL ...IS ONLY ROTWANG!
SO, FRIENDS, HOIST A DRINK TO OLD STAUB... AND DON'T FORGET A CHEER FOR THE FLAMES THAT BURNT BOTH SHIP AND FLESH FROM ME...
FOR BURN MY SOUL? AMMA HIMSELF CANNOT!
I'LL SEE YE ALL ON THE OTHER SIDE...


ON MY MOTHER'S GRAVE, FALCO--I'LL GUARANTEE YE A FINE NEW BODY IF YER PLAN REALLY WORKS! AS SOON AS WE REACH THE FLEET, I'LL ORDER THE XLEXU TO FIX YE UP!
I'D LOVE TO BELIEVE YOU, ROTWANG, BUT FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN OF YOUR PRINCIPLES... I KNOW YOU'D ONLY RENEG!

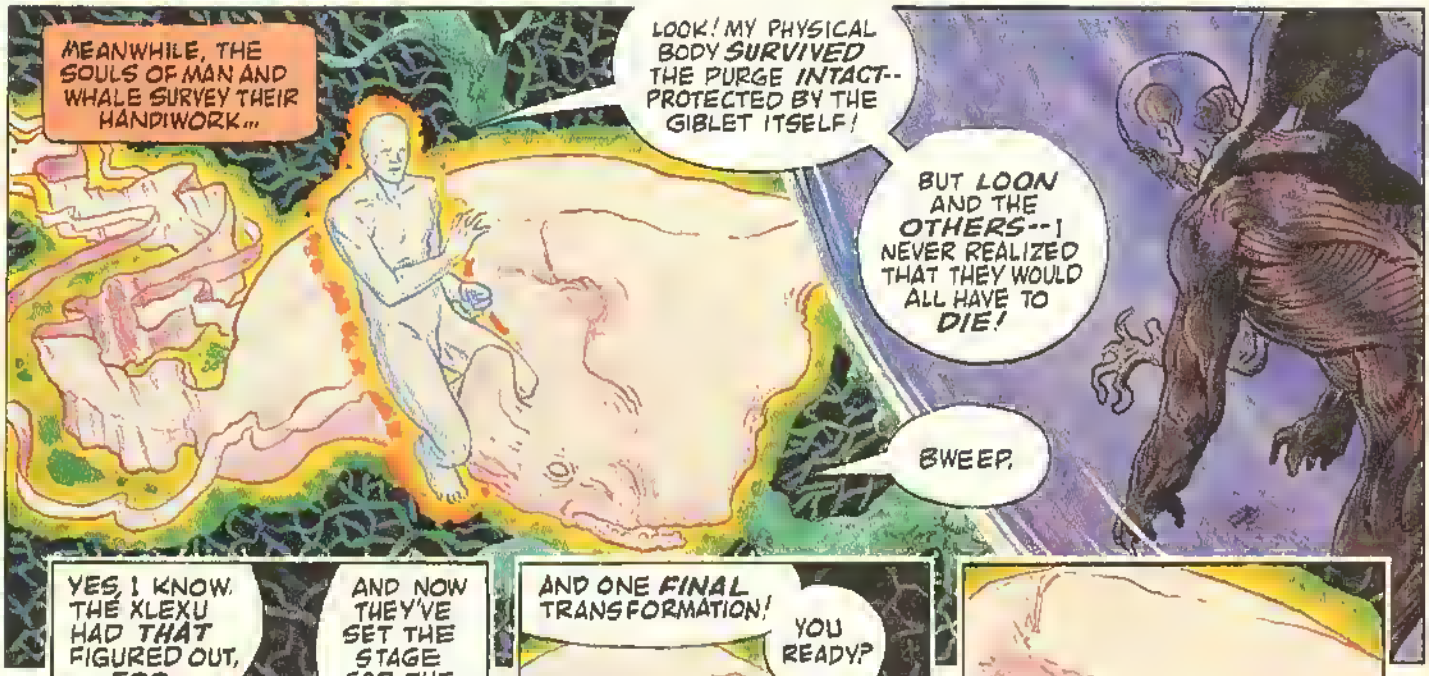

KITTEN, YOU SHOULD KNOW THERE IS A WAY TO BIND A CAPTAIN TO HIS WORD-- IT'S CALLED THE EYE OF TRUTH!
HUSH, WOMAN!
AND ONCE HE IS SO MARKED, ALL WILL KNOW HE OWES A DEBT TO ONE OF US!
SPHINX, IF ANY OF US DESERVES TO SURVIVE THIS, IT'S YOU!

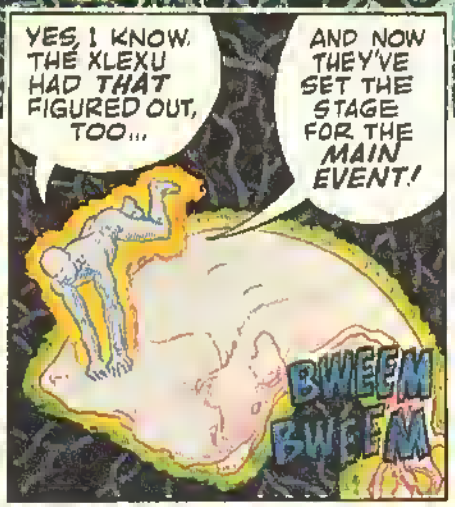
AND IF THERE'S A DEBT OWED HERE, IT'S THE ONE I OWE TO YOU!
THE EYE OF TRUTH IT IS, ROTWANG. YOU'VE GOT A DEAL!
DAMN YE, SPHINX, AND YER INFERNAL MEDDLING!

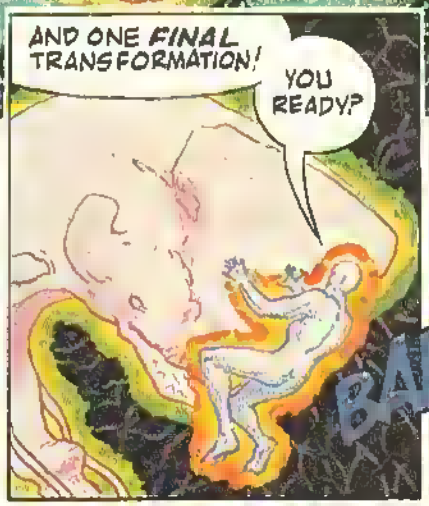
AND DAMN YE, FALCO, AND ALL YER IDIOTIC PRINCIPLES!

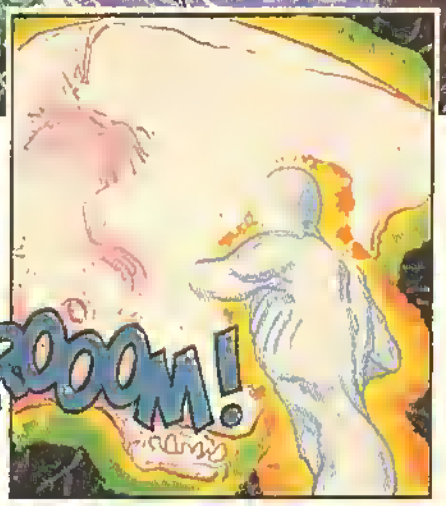

AND A THOUSAND BLOODY CURSES ON THIS WHALE WHO DEVOURS ME PIECE BY NNNNGHH! PIECE... OOOOOOHH...

THE PLAN, FALCO--AND IT BETTER WORK!

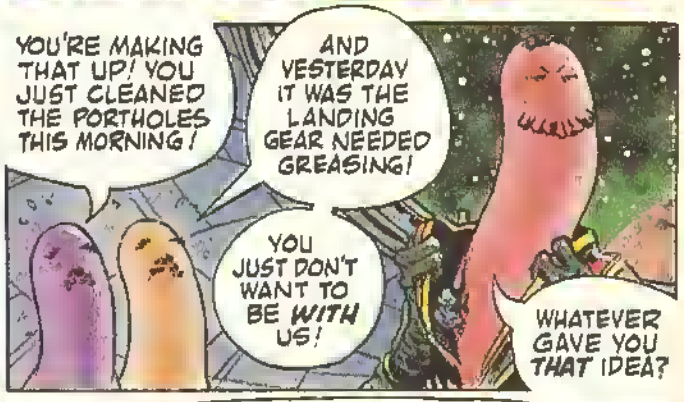

MEANWHILE, THE SOULS OF MAN AND WHALE SURVEY THEIR HANDIWORK...
LOOK! MY PHYSICAL BODY SURVIVED THE PURGE INTACT-- PROTECTED BY THE GIBLET ITSELF!
BUT LOON AND THE OTHERS--I NEVER REALIZED THAT THEY WOULD ALL HAVE TO DIE!
BWEEP.

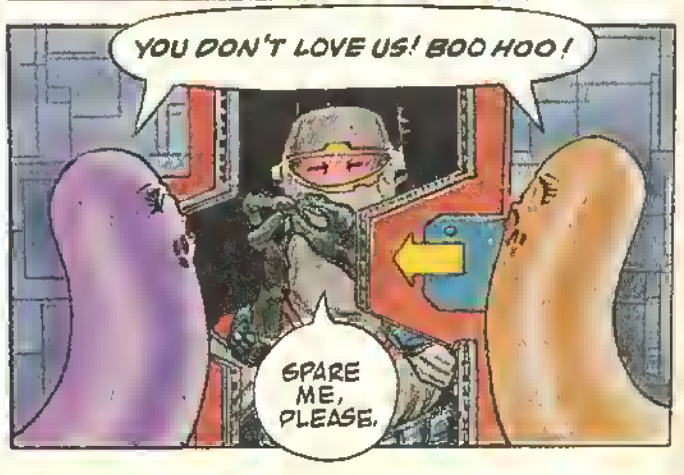

YES, I KNOW. THE XLEXU HAD THAT FIGURED OUT, TOO...
AND NOW THEY'VE SET THE STAGE FOR THE MAIN EVENT!
BWEEM BWEEM


AND ONE FINAL TRANSFORMATION!
YOU READY?


BAROOOM!

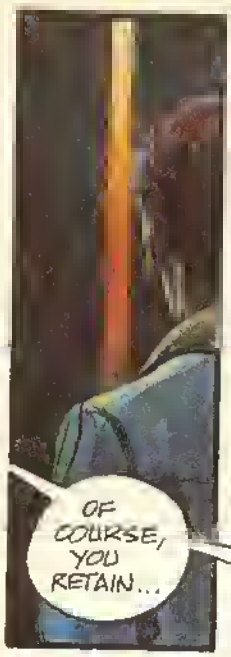
BACK IN SPACE...
YOU DON'T WANT TO GET DRESSED YET, RIDGE. YOU WANT TO PLAY WITH US!
WILL YOU GET OFF ME?
C'MON-- IT TAKES THREE TO TANGO!
I'VE GOT TO GO OUTSIDE-- THE PORTHOLES NEED CLEANING!

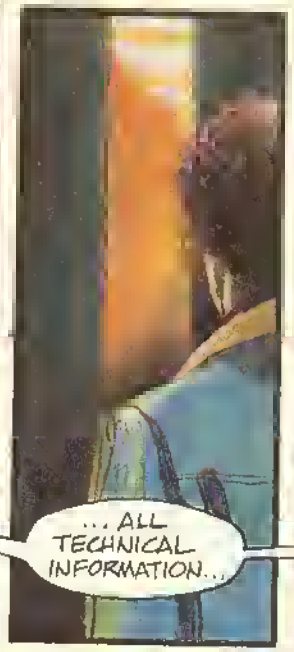

YOU'RE MAKING THAT UP! YOU JUST CLEANED THE PORTHOLES THIS MORNING!
AND YESTERDAY IT WAS THE LANDING GEAR NEEDED GREASING!
YOU JUST DON'T WANT TO BE WITH US!
WHATEVER GAVE YOU THAT IDEA?


YOU DON'T LOVE US! BOO HOO!
SPARE ME, PLEASE.

ABRAXAS & THE EARTHMAN continues next issue

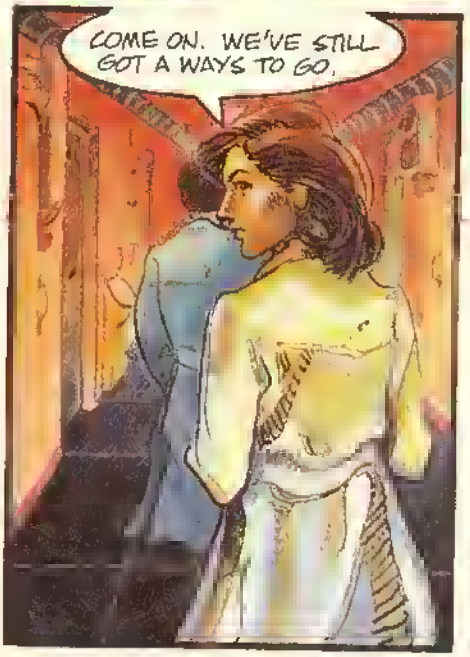
HELLO!
RISE AWAKE
© MC HEMPEL 1981


OF COURSE, YOU RETAIN...

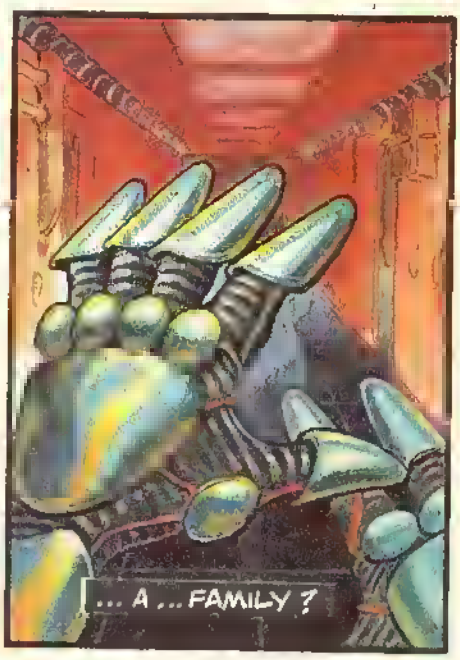

...ALL TECHNICAL INFORMATION...

...REGARDING YOUR MISSION.

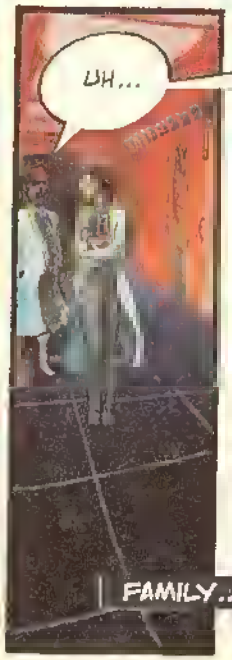
EMOTIONAL TIES HAD TO BE SEVERED.
YOUR SIGNED STATEMENT, ALLOWING US TO DO THIS, IS ON FILE.

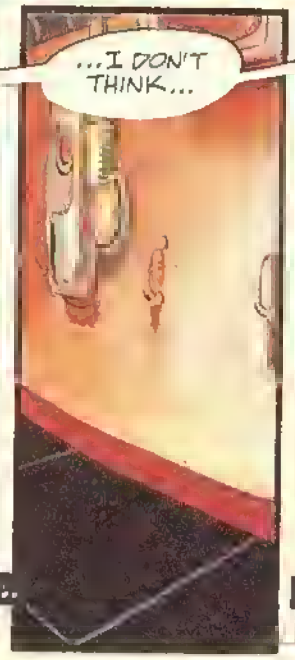

COME ON. WE'VE STILL GOT A WAYS TO GO.

SO — SO I HAVE...

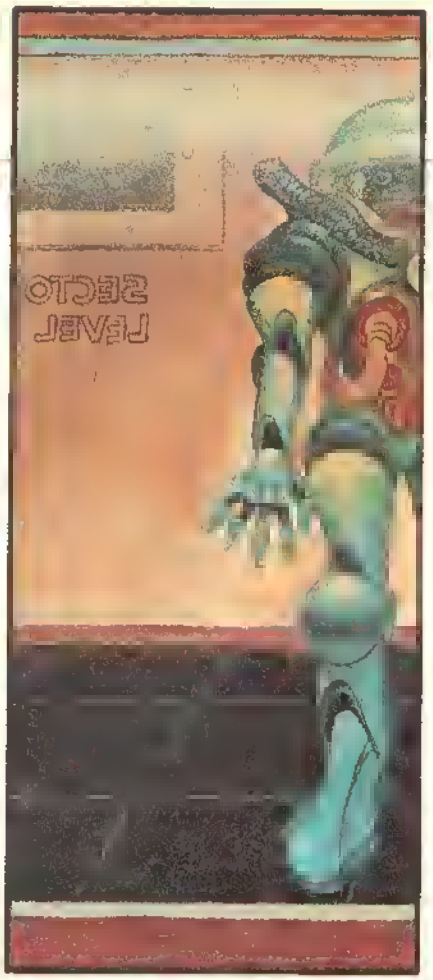

...A...FAMILY?

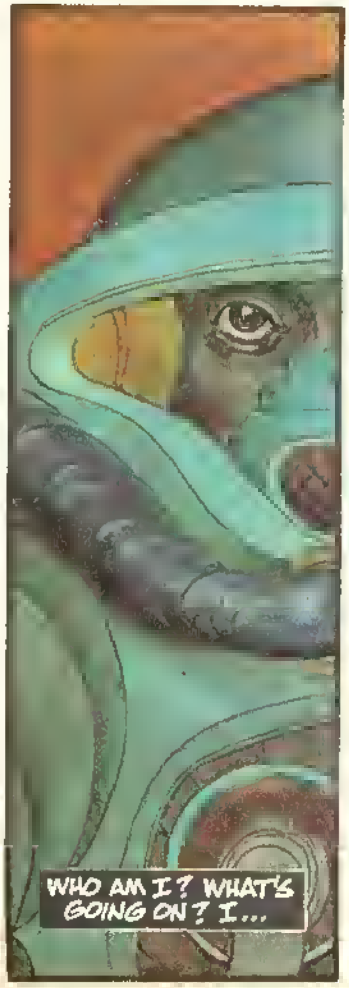
YES! YOU HAVE A FAMILY! NOW LET'S...


UH...
FAMILY...

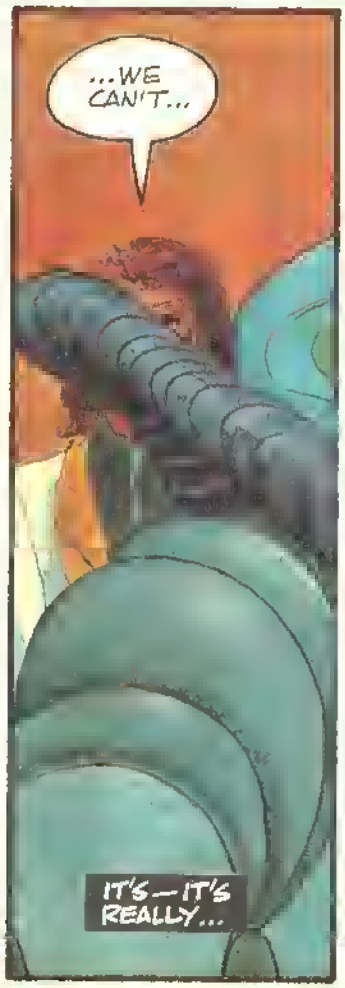

...I DON'T THINK...

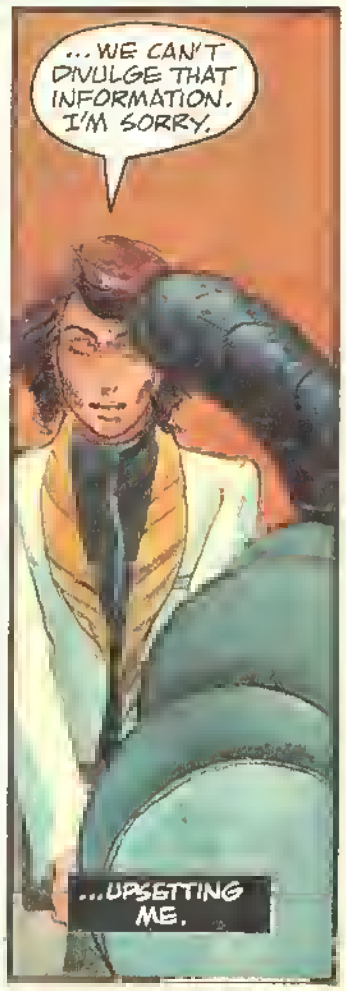
...YOU SHOULD HAVE TOLD HIM THAT.
...FAMILY...




WHO AM I? WHAT'S GOING ON? I...

UM...
...I'D REALLY LIKE TO KNOW.


...WE CAN'T...
IT'S — IT'S REALLY...


...WE CAN'T DIVULGE THAT INFORMATION. I'M SORRY.
...UPSETTING ME.

STRIKING *SKILL* AND *PROWESS*, MAKING *VAIN* BEFORE THE INNOCENT LADIES ALL ABLUSH.

"LET ME WEAR THY RYBAND, MILADY, AND I WILL *GRUNT* AND *SWEAT* FOR THEE AND *SMITE MY FRIEND* WITH A WOODEN SWORD!"

BY AND BY THEIR ROQUES WILL *SPLINTER*...

AND AT THIS LONG DAY'S END WILL *KICK* AND *SPIT* AT EACH AND *ALL*, CLAIMING *FLESHLY PRIZE* NOT GOD *NOR* MAN CAN POSSESS.

CHIVALRY!

IN TRUTH...

... MY HEART WAS NEVER IN IT.

Lettered by Linda Lessmann

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NOW LET ME TELL YOU OF *MY LOVE*...

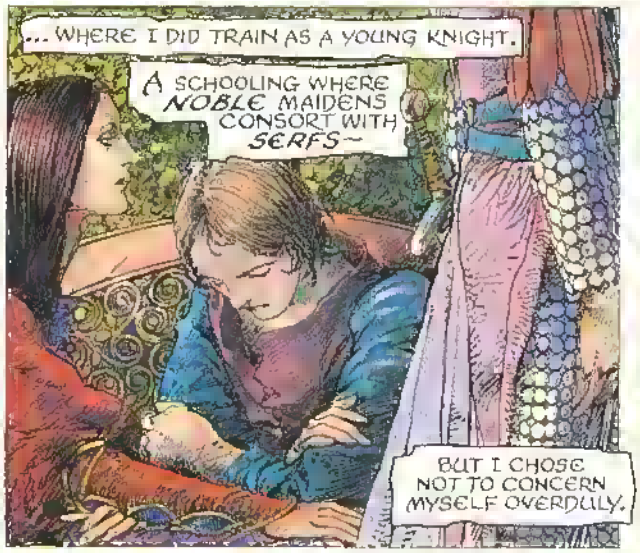
...WHOM ONE DAY~ *THIS DAY*, AS *IS* MY STORY~ DID COME TO ME...

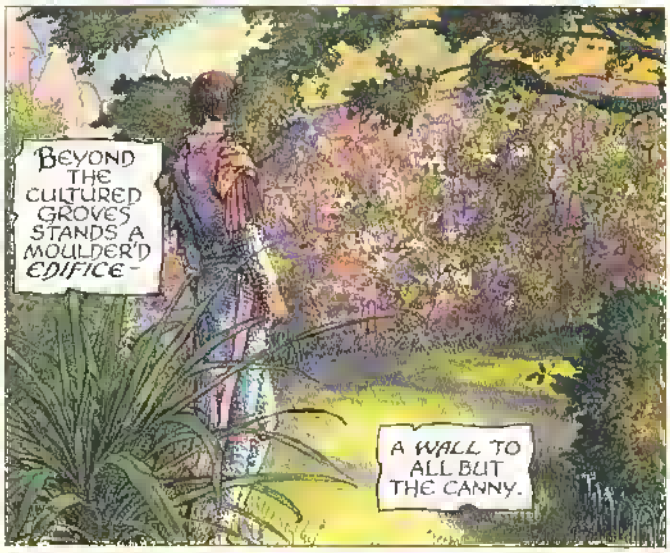
THE BEGUILING

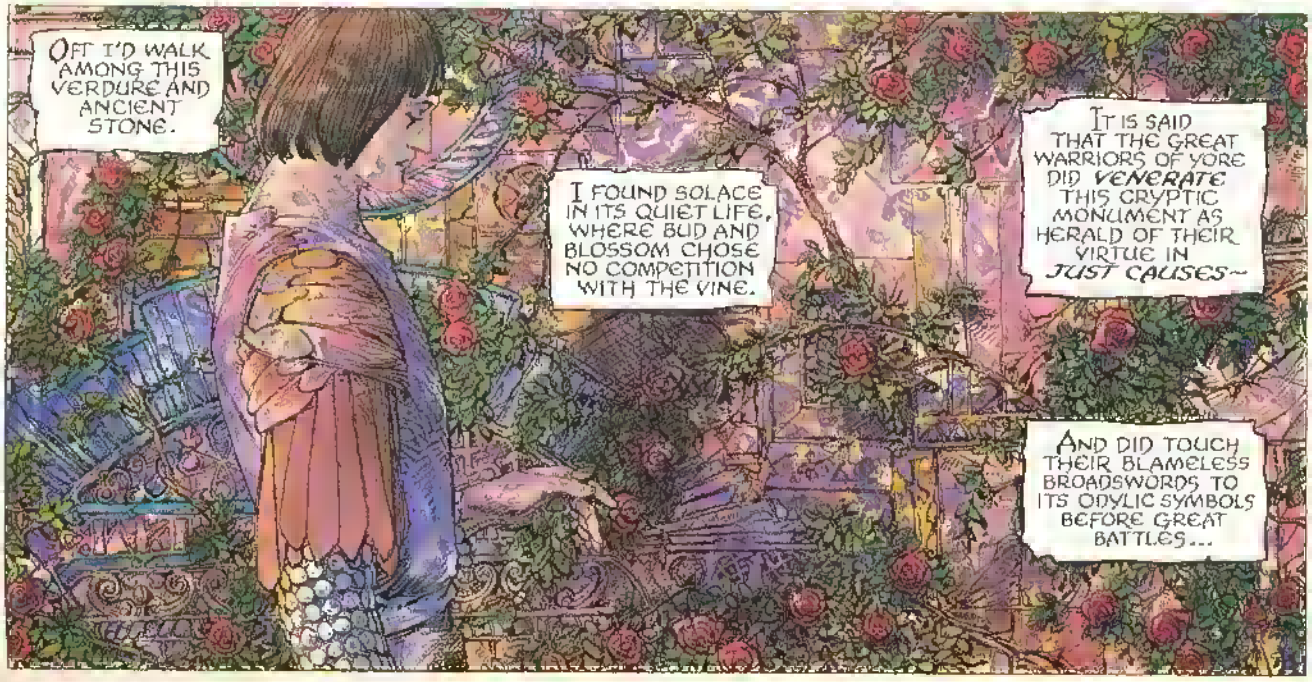
BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH

...AS I STRAYED, LISTLESS AND ALL OPEN...
...THROUGH THE GARDENS OF CAERLYON COURT~

WHERE I DID TRAIN AS A YOUN

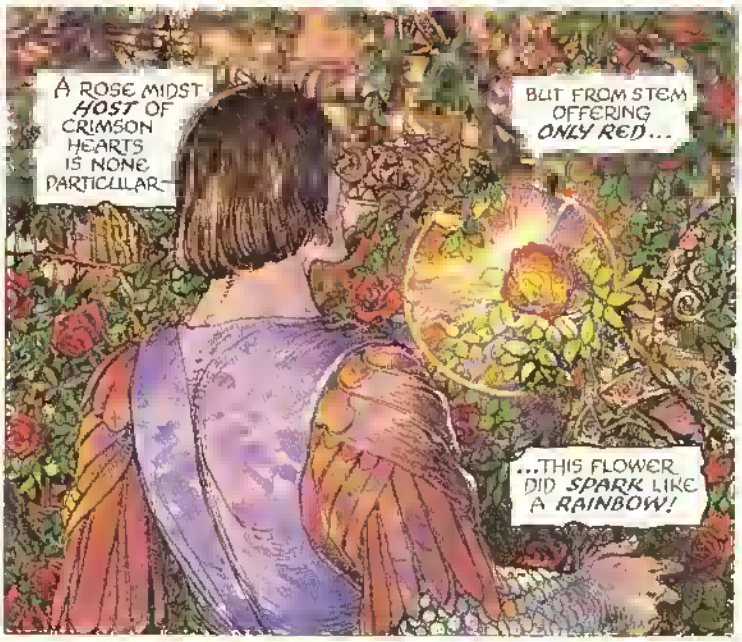

...WHERE I DID TRAIN AS A YOUNG KNIGHT.
A SCHOOLING WHERE NOBLE MAIDENS CONSORT WITH SERFS~
BUT I CHOSE NOT TO CONCERN MYSELF OVERDULY.


BEYOND THE CULTURED GROVES STANDS A MOULDER'D EDIFICE~
A WALL TO ALL BUT THE CANNY.


OFT I'D WALK AMONG THIS VERDURE AND ANCIENT STONE.
I FOUND SOLACE IN ITS QUIET LIFE, WHERE BUD AND BLOSSOM CHOSE NO COMPETITION WITH THE VINE.
IT IS SAID THAT THE GREAT WARRIORS OF YORE DID VENERATE THIS CRYPTIC MONUMENT AS HERALD OF THEIR VIRTUE IN JUST CAUSES~
AND DID TOUCH THEIR BLAMELESS BROADSWORDS TO ITS ODYLIC SYMBOLS BEFORE GREAT BATTLES...

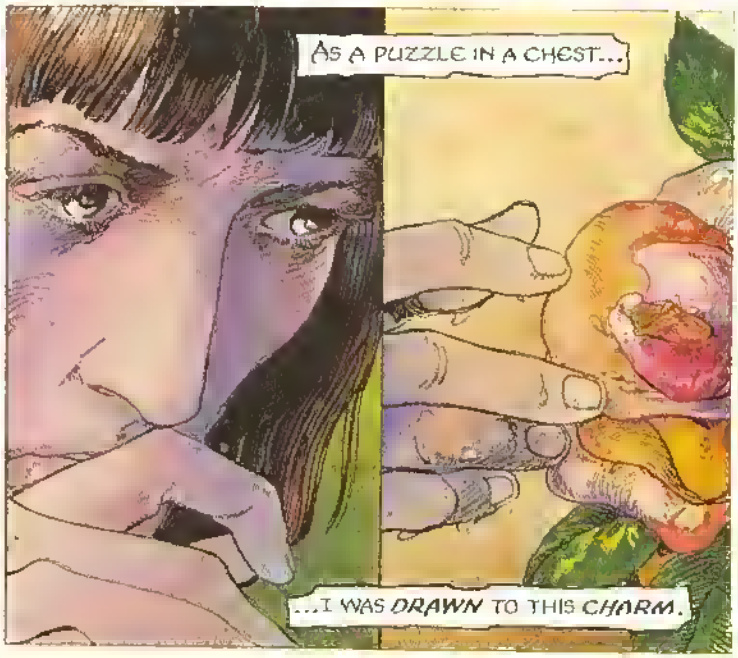
...THEN HANG THEIR BLOOD SPATTERED SHIELDS HERE 'PON ORDAINED RETURN.
THUS DO LEGENDS SPIN– BUT I DIGRESS– I'VE MY OWN TALE TO TELL...

LO, THIS DAY– AS I MARK– I CAME UPON A STRANGE APPARITION–


A ROSE MIDST HOST OF CRIMSON HEARTS IS NONE PARTICULAR–
BUT FROM STEM OFFERING ONLY RED...
...THIS FLOWER DID SPARK LIKE A RAINBOW!

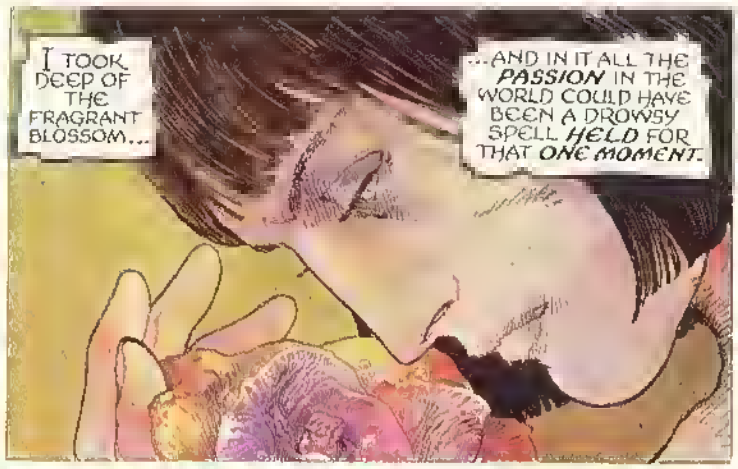
IT GLOWED AS IF SOMETHING UNEARTHLY...
...SOMETHING ALL MYSTICAL...
...AND AS I REACHED TO TOUCH...

MY HAND PASSED THROUGH IT!

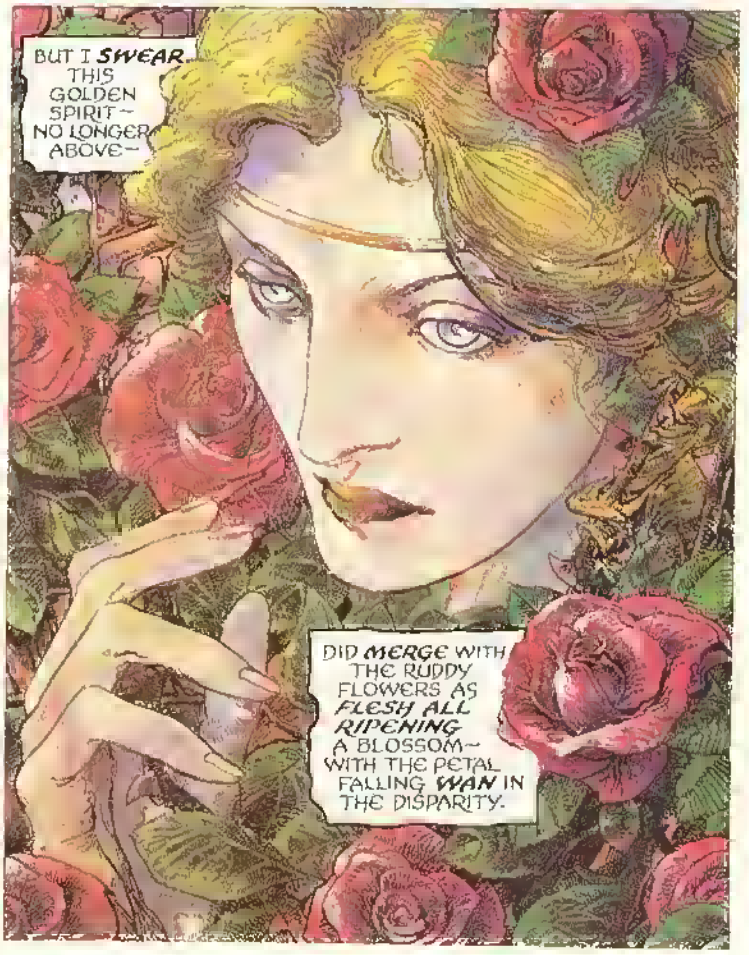

AS A PUZZLE IN A CHEST...
...I WAS DRAWN TO THIS CHARM.

SUDDEN WONDER!
A HOST OF DIABOLICAL CREATURES!
RUSHING LIKE THE WIND OF HADES...
...SEEMED TO MANIFEST FROM THE VERY ROCK ITSELF!
I WOULD HAVE FLED AT THAT SECOND...
...WERE IT NOT FOR...
...AN EVEN GREATER WONDER!
AN ENCHANTED PALE SKIN VISION—
WITH WINGS OF AN ANGEL— AS WOULD BE FITTING.
SHE PLUCKED THE RADIANT FLOWER...
...AND OFFERED IT TO ME AS IF A SYMBOLE OF LOVE.
THEN SHE SPOKE TO ME, AND HER TONE WAS A SOFT BELL IN A HONEY'D BREEZE...
"DO YOU DREAM O MAN?...
"...OR DO YOU WALK AWAKE WITH TRUTH AS YOUR BURDEN?"

MY TONGUE DID TRIP AT THIS, "OF TRUTH I AM A MERE APPRENTICE, BUT I AM ABOUND IN DREAMS...
"...AND I CARE ONLY OF THE FAIR HEART THAT WILL CONJURE MINE OWN."
"THEN YOU DREAM OF ME," SHE SAID. "BREATHE OF MY HEART, YOUNG INNOCENT."

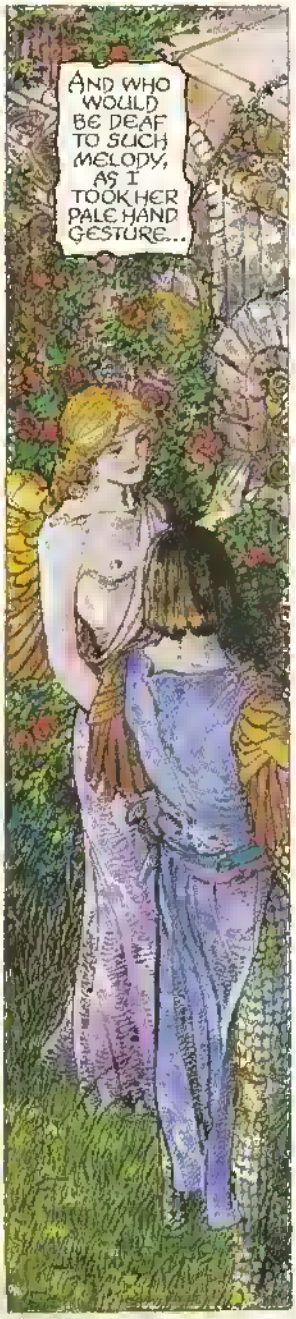

I TOOK DEEP OF THE FRAGRANT BLOSSOM...
...AND IN IT ALL THE PASSION IN THE WORLD COULD HAVE BEEN A DROWSY SPELL HELD FOR THAT ONE MOMENT.

THEN I STOLE A GLANCE BACK TO THE WALL OF WONDER~
AND PERHAPS MY EYES WERE LIT WITH LOVE—OR MAY'T BEEN A GLASS IN THE SUN—


BUT I SWEAR THIS GOLDEN SPIRIT~ NO LONGER ABOVE~
DID MERGE WITH THE RUDDY FLOWERS AS FLESH ALL RIPENING A BLOSSOM~ WITH THE PETAL FALLING WAN IN THE DISPARITY.

NIGH MUTE AND FOOLISH AS A BOY I SHUDDERED AT THE TOUCH OF HER CHASTE AND GENTLE FINGERS—

AND THE BRUSH OF HER WARM SWEET BREATH...
...SET MY YOUNG BLOOD AFLAME!
"I AM THINE," SHE MURMERED, AND THOU SHALT BE ONE WITH ME."

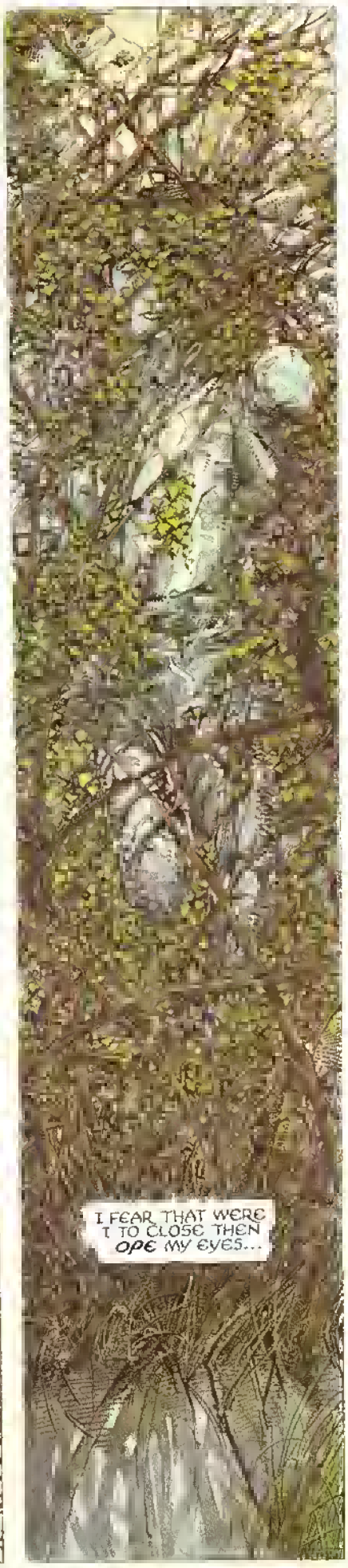

AND WHO WOULD BE DEAF TO SUCH MELODY, AS I TOOK HER PALE HAND GESTURE...

...AND AS IF WINE HAD TAKEN MY BRAIN IN TIDE ALL RUSHING...

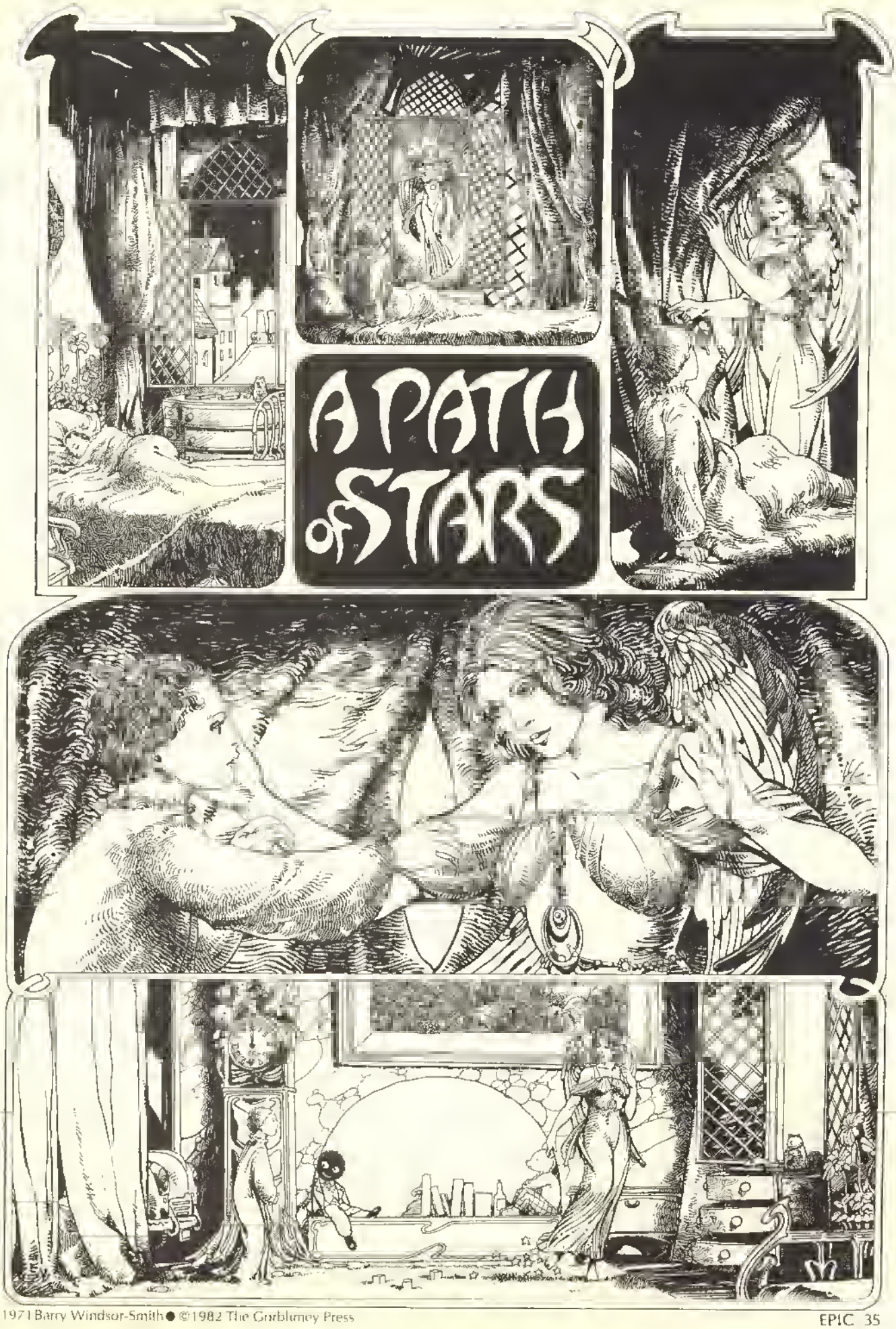
...I FOLLOW'D THROUGH BRIAR AND STONE...
...AS IF IT WERE MYSTIC SMOKE!

AND THEN MY PUMPING BREATH WAS BECALMED—
MY YEARNING HEART TRANSFIXED:—
IN THIS QUIET GLORY OF LOVE FULFILLED.

I MAKE ONE PAUSE, HOWEVER-


I FEAR THAT WERE I TO CLOSE THEN OPE MY EYES...

...MY ANGEL WOULD BE GONE.
BWS



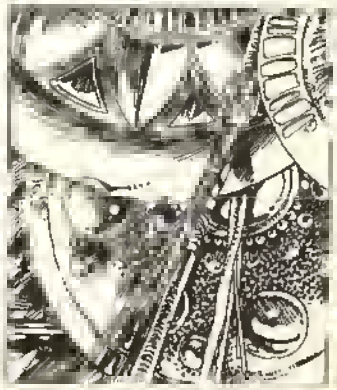
1971 Barry Windsor-Smith ● ©1982 The Gorblimey Press

SNAP!
POP
POP!
POP
POP!
POP
SPLAT!

THE HORDE

illustrated by
Barry Windsor-Smith
written by
Archie Goodwin

1.
As the siege began its second month, they breached the fortress walls. For three more weeks battle raged across the courtyards, stables, and antechambers of the keep's main buildings. After five days of close combat and painful retreat through stone-hewn corridors, stairways, and living quarters, the remaining defenders were barricaded in the great Hall of Ancestors. On midnight of the sixth day, the barricades fell and the invaders poured into the hall driving the hand-



ful of survivors to the tapestried alcove where stood the Tree of Shields, a towering peg-studded column of wood hung with the battle shields of those who had ruled and served the

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keep for centuries past. One by one, the handful died; ripped, hewn, and bloodily slaughtered. At last, only two stood, side by side on the marbled steps to the Tree of Shields. Kristan, Lord of Omega Keep, and Sabra, the Swordbearer. One man and one woman making a final stand for the human race against the endless horde; a legion of howling corpses and mad-eyed skeletons; an army of the dead now overrunning the last stronghold of the living.

2.

The earth was dying. The sun losing its fire. For untold eons it had hung in gray skies, a watery pink globe radiating a cool glow and plunging the world it once had warmed into perpetual twilight. Morning after morning, scattered pockets of humanity woke and looked to the sky, wondering if this was the day the pale sun would finally spasm and wink out. Evening after evening, they went to their beds, despairing, uncertain if the falling darkness would last for a night or become a lifeless eternity. Each person lived with the sense of doom, with the knowledge

that if the end would not come today, then surely tomorrow; if not in their generation, then surely in the next. Strange cults and stranger religions abounded, but little hope. Life was lived with desperation, with resignation or resolve, but without promise. Wealth, power, and pleasure were commonly and cruelly pursued. If honor and nobility existed they were usually linked with choosing how one would die.

3.

Some came like animals, hissing and snarling from partially rotted vocal chords, clawing with brittle, broken nails and biting with teeth dark and deeply decayed. Others staggered stiffly, demon warriors without flesh; engines of bone and gristle hacking, stabbing, and pressing on with mad, mechanical intensity. And some were barely cold; comrades-in-

arms of just a day past or but a week gone; flesh still moist, wounds still dripping. They came in armor of ages long forgotten; they came in breechclouts and spiked-helms of Omega Keep's own guard. But they came. Some from half a world's distance; some from the nearest hall or rampart. They came. And being dead they could not die. They could be shattered, smashed, or hewn into chunks that still twitched with motion but could no longer harm. The broad, double-edged weapons wielded by Kristan and Sabra did this far better than any of the curved, single-edge blades common to the time. Without them, the pair would have fallen to the horde long before. But no matter how many undead foes went down under these swords of a bygone age, more swarmed into the Hall of Ancestors. Kristan clubbed with his sword pommel and reverse-slashed with one hand while his other arm blocked and bashed

with a shield bearing the Omega Keep standard. Bones splintered; blood sprayed. And still they came. He risked a glance at Sabra. She fought with sure, skillful strokes and an expert's ever varying rhythms even after hours of combat. She had brought these weapons and taught him to use one. Taught him that, and far more. Kristan knew he would never have her ability; he counted on strength and stamina to keep him fighting at her side. Earlier he had hoped they might see another dawn together. Now, as the circling faces of death and decay tightened around them, binding them to the Tree of Shields, Kristan prayed for one more hour. And still they came.

4.

Some time after the Fifth Cataclysm, the magic came back. As earth and sun began their millennia long death throes, many turned to sorcery and found magic, gone since the planet's dawn era, had returned. Great wizards and magicians rose. Some futilely drawing on the magic for ways to save the dying earth; some expending it to forge their own power. So the Wizard Wars began. Great armies and great sorcery clashed. And were exhausted. Once more the magic withered. But as it did someone called up the horde. Summoned the dead to rise and fight the living. Summoned and failed to send back. Magic remained to feed the spell, but not enough to vanquish it. The wizards died, but their army marched on. Men died, and that army grew.

5.

Omega Keep. The name told all. It was built to be humanity's last bastion. Its Lords were dedicated to fight until the end. They called earth's finest warriors to their standard. They forayed against the vast number of tyrants, barbarians, marauders, and madmen a world without

future could produce. They died gloriously, with honor, and their battle shields were hung high on the tree in the great hall. For many generations they held the mounting legions of the horde at bay. But the toll was great. Fewer heroes appeared to swell the ranks of Omega Keep. The proud forays grew shorter and in time became defensive patrols. Gradually even these ceased. And one cold morning,

Kristan looked out from a rampart to the sweeping wastes beyond where a vanguard of living dead were beginning to move and knew it had fallen to him to be the last Lord of Omega Keep.

6.

Sabra. The swordbearer. Days after it had been declared impossible to move in or out of the Keep, she reached them. She came

over the wall, one blade in hand, dripping gore from the swath she had hacked through the horde, the other strapped to her back. The swords were forged of a metal no one recognized and of an age beyond counting. To combat the undead legions, Sabra had descended into the abandoned mines of Earth's oldest mountains, searching and crawling through tunnels dark and terrible which seemed to plunge to the bowels of the world. In a luminous tomb, she found the swords amid other relics from times unimagined. They reeked of magic; stronger magic than the doomed earth knew; magic that might well have been from the dawn world era. Magic that some at Omega Keep hoped might save them, if they could but unlock it and make it work through the swords. Kristan felt no such hope. If the swords had magic, it seemed beyond their evoking. It was enough that he could die with such a weapon in his hands, reaving even more of the shambling horde than he had previously estimated. Yet if Kristan felt no hope, the presence of Sabra did bring him some-

thing he had long found impossible in an age marking off the hours until death and eternal oblivion. He spoke with her, trained with her, looked into her strong, beautiful features framed by dark red hair, and felt desire. Desire she returned. Desire that in other times might have been something deeper, something better. But as the thronging dead grew, filling the plain, ready to burst and overrun Omega Keep, even desire was a miracle.

7.

A corpse struck at Kristan with a blazing torch from the Keep's wall. He blocked it with his shield and cleaved with his sword through rotted flesh until the thing fell in two. But now his back was exposed. Blades held in skeletal grips slashed toward it. Until Sabra struck, shattering them from the white boned arms that wielded them. Kristan smiled grimly. How many more times would they save each other before it all ended? Earlier he had prayed for an hour. They had had that and more. Perhaps another moment. Two. He almost laughed. Like the rest of this doomed twilight

world, Kristan had lived for the time he would die. Like those whose shields hung above him, he had guided his life toward a hero's death. Now it was here. Why seek to prolong it? He looked to Sabra. She read his eyes. And suddenly she was shouting, screaming to be heard above the din of battle.

8.

Something seared Kristan's left arm. His shield was aflame. He swung it violently back and forth to put out the fire. Embers flew. The aging cloth of the tapestry behind the Tree of Shields ignited. Kristan's senses registered it; his mind did not. It echoed with the words Sabra had shouted. *Life*. For the first time she had seen that in

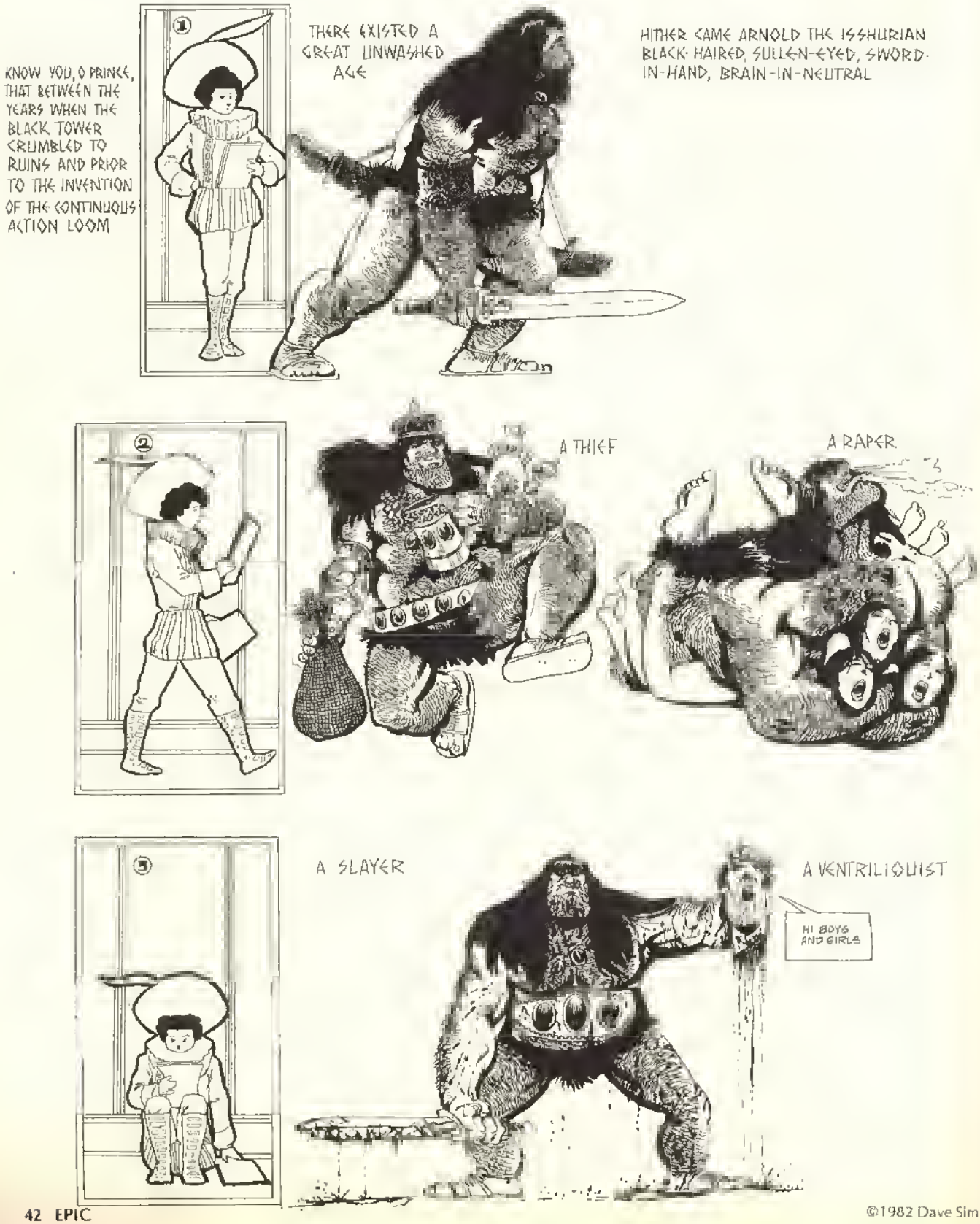
his eyes instead of the resolve to die. *Life*. She wanted it too. For herself. For him. For the part of both of them that now grew inside her. *Life*. With death their goal, she had seen no need to tell him of the child. Now she screamed the fact. *Life*. He wanted it as he never believed possible. Kristan hurled the burning shield from his arm into the attackers. Fire spread. He and Sabra moved behind the Tree of Shields, nearer the flaming tapestry. Its intense heat licked and scorched them but also slowed their mindless foes. Between fighting strokes, they hacked at the column's base as a last, desperate notion seemed to seize both of them. *Impossible*, Kristan thought. The column was too thick; the ancient wood too strong. And yet, great hunks splintered and flew. The twin swords sang. Magically. *Dawn world magic*. It was suddenly clear. *The magic of life*. That was what made the blades respond. *Life*. The Tree of Shields fell, carrying flames and the traditions of Omega Keep with it, making the Hall of An-

cestors an inferno. And making a temporary bridge over which Kristan and Sabra could run as around them the army of the dead shrieked and burned.

9.

Between the magic of their blades and the searing, spreading flame, they cleared a path to a rampart and the plain beyond. It was empty. Omega Keep burned behind them and the great mass that was the horde had poured dumbly within it. Kristan and Sabra moved away unpursued, striding toward the dawn. Perhaps other survivors waited out there; perhaps whole lands existed the horde had never touched. Perhaps not. The earth might die tomorrow. Or endure another thousand years. Whatever time remained, they would use it to live. Morning came. Weakly, dimly, as always. The sun was still dying. But they were not.

ARNOLD TH



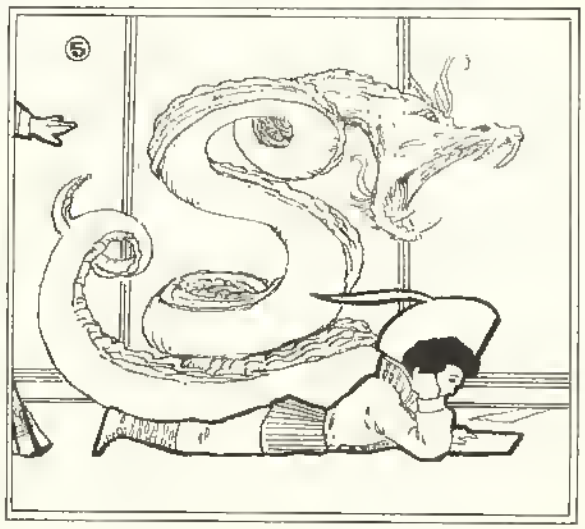
©1982 Dave Sim

ISSHURIAN

WITH GIGANTIC MELANCHOLIES

AND
GIGANTIC
MIRTH

TO TREAD THE JEWELED THRONES
OF ESTARCION UNDER HIS
SANDALLED FEET.

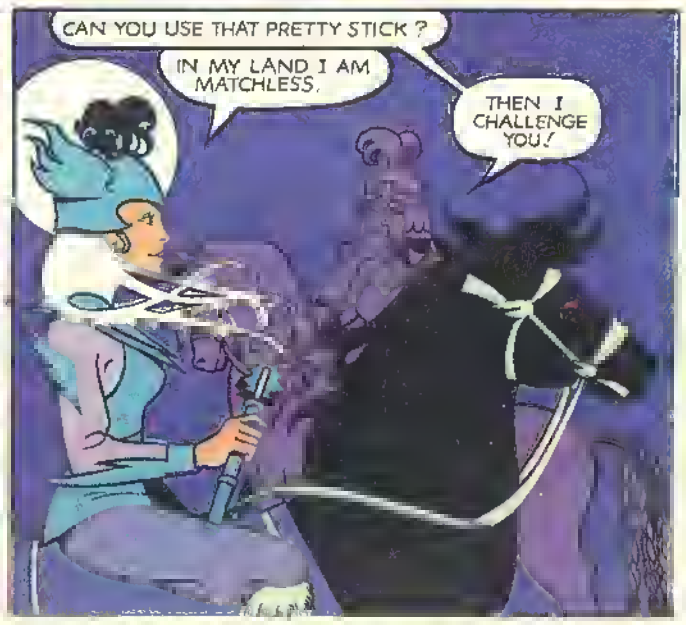


THE PAGE GAZED UPON THE SISTERS.
O MY LADIES, EACH OF YOU IS BEAUTIFUL, AND TOGETHER YOU RIVAL EVEN THE MOON!
BUT EVERY-ONE SAYS IT, LADY.
DON'T SAY THAT. IT'S NOT LUCKY, AND IT ISN'T TRUE.

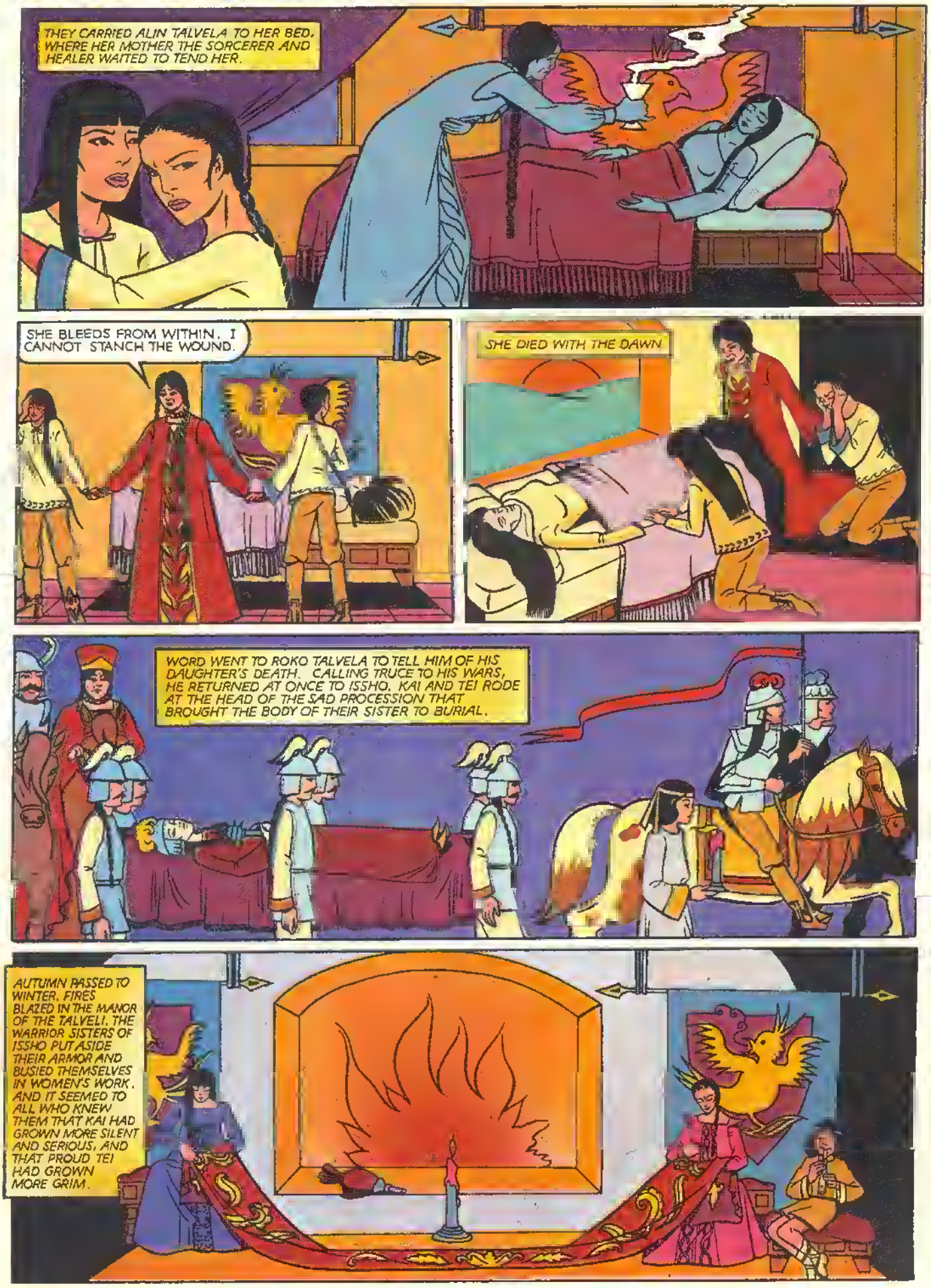
LOOK!

AS THE RIDER CAME CLOSER, THEY COULD ALL SEE THAT SHE WAS A WOMAN.
I DID NOT KNOW THERE WAS ANOTHER WOMAN WARRIOR IN THE MIDDLE COUNTIES.

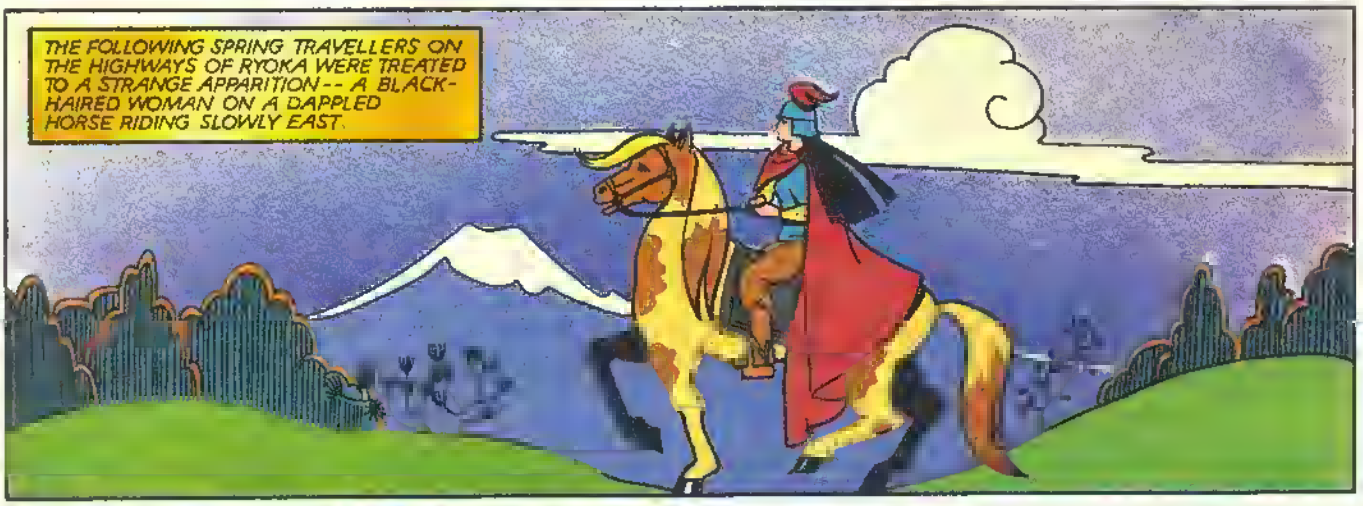
IT IS AS THEY SING; YOU ARE INDEED FAIR. YET NOT SO FAIR, I THINK, AS THE SHINING MOON.
YOU SEEM TO KNOW WHO WE ARE. BUT WE DO NOT KNOW YOU. WHO ARE YOU, AND FROM WHERE DO YOU COME?
MY HOME IS FAR AWAY. MY NAME IS -- SEDI.


CAN YOU USE THAT PRETTY STICK?
IN MY LAND I AM MATCHLESS.
THEN I CHALLENGE YOU!

BACK AND FORTH THEY STRUCK AND CIRCLED ON THE RISE.
Oh, IT HURTS.
THY BEAUTY IS LESS THAN IT WAS, WOMEN OF ISSHO.

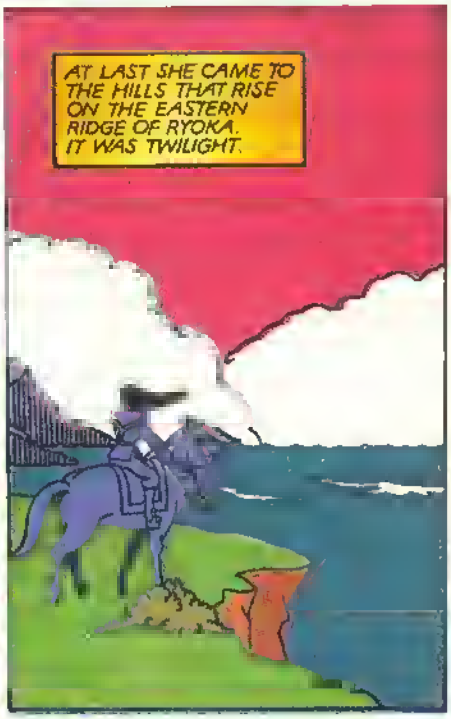

THEY CARRIED ALIN TALVELA TO HER BED, WHERE HER MOTHER THE SORCERER AND HEALER WAITED TO TEND HER.
SHE BLEEDS FROM WITHIN. I CANNOT STANCH THE WOUND.
SHE DIED WITH THE DAWN.
WORD WENT TO ROKO TALVELA TO TELL HIM OF HIS DAUGHTER'S DEATH. CALLING TRUCE TO HIS WARS, HE RETURNED AT ONCE TO ISSHO. KAI AND TEI RODE AT THE HEAD OF THE SAD PROCESSION THAT BROUGHT THE BODY OF THEIR SISTER TO BURIAL.
AUTUMN PASSED TO WINTER. FIRES BLAZED IN THE MANOR OF THE TALVELI. THE WARRIOR SISTERS OF ISSHO PUT ASIDE THEIR ARMOR AND BUSIED THEMSELVES IN WOMEN'S WORK. AND IT SEEMED TO ALL WHO KNEW THEM THAT KAI HAD GROWN MORE SILENT AND SERIOUS, AND THAT PROUD TEI HAD GROWN MORE GRIM.

IN SPRING ROKO TALVELA RETURNED TO HIS WARS. KAI AND TEI RE-DONNED THEIR ARMOR. AT DAWN AND AT DUSK THEY RODE, ACCOMPANIED BY THE PAGE. SPRING GAVE WAY TO SUMMER, AND SUMMER TO AUTUMN. THE FARMERS BURNED LEAVES IN THE DUSK.
AND ONE SOFT AFTERNOON A FIGURE IN SILVER ON A COAL-BLACK HORSE CAME OUT OF THE HAZE.
IT'S SHE!
STAY, TRAVELER. THERE IS NO WELCOME FOR YOU IN ISSHO.
I DID NOT COME FOR WELCOME, O DAUGHTERS OF THE TALVELAI.
EVIL WOMAN, ALIN WAS ALL THAT IS TRUSTING AND FAIR, AND YOU STRUCK HER DOWN. COME, SEDI, COME AND FIGHT ME.
AS YOU WILL.
THEY FOUGHT. THEY THRUST AND PARRIED AND LUNGED. A CHILL SETTLED OVER THE COUNTRYSIDE.
A CLOUD PASSED OVER THE MOON. IN THE DIMNESS, SEDI LUNGED FORWARD.
TEI!


THE FOLLOWING SPRING TRAVELLERS ON THE HIGHWAYS OF RYOKA WERE TREATED TO A STRANGE APPARITION -- A BLACK-HAIRED WOMAN ON A DAPPLED HORSE RIDING SLOWLY EAST.

AT THE INNS SHE WOULD ASK:
WHERE IS THE HOME OF THE NEAREST WITCH OR WIZARD?

OF THE WISEFOLK SHE ALWAYS ASKED THE SAME THING:
I LOOK FOR THE LADY WHO IS SOMETIMES KNOWN AS SEDI.
AND THE WISEST GRAVELY SHOOK THEIR HEADS

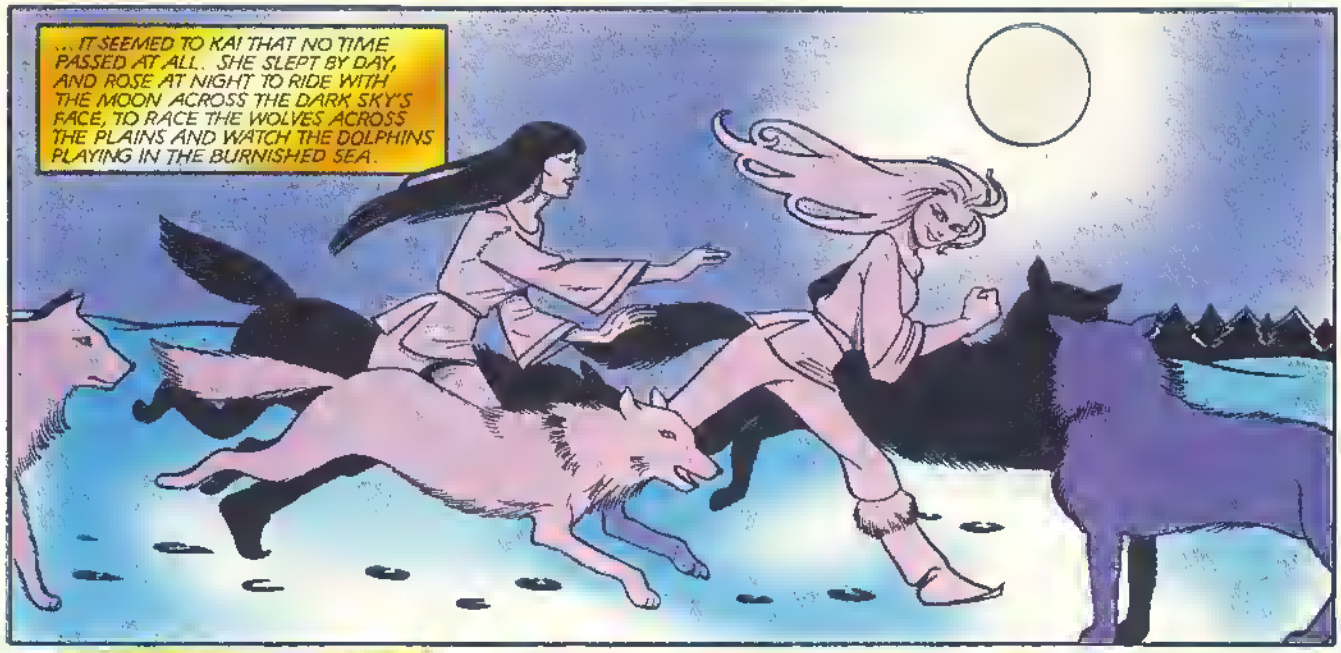

AT LAST SHE CAME TO THE HILLS THAT RISE ON THE EASTERN RIDGE OF RYOKA. IT WAS TWILIGHT.

THE SILVER SEA GREW BRIGHTER.
SO THIS IS WHERE THE MOON LIVES.

O MOON, SEE ME.
MY ARMOR IS FILTH-COVERED. MY HORSE IS WORN TO A SKELETON. I AM NO LONGER BEAUTIFUL. O JEALOUS ONE, CEASE YOUR ANGER. OUT OF YOUR PITY, LET ME JOIN MY SISTERS. RELEASE ME!

SHE WAITED FOR AN ANSWER. NONE CAME. SUDDENLY SHE GREW VERY SLEEPY.
SHE WOKE TO WARMTH AND THE SMELL OF FOOD.
COME AND EAT.
THE FOOD WAS REAL, NO SHADOW OR ILLUSION.
WHEN SHE HAD DONE...
O MOON, OR SHADE OF THE MOON, OR WHATEVER YOU MAY BE, LONG HAVE I SEARCHED FOR YOU, BY WHOSE HAND PERISHED THE TWO PEOPLE MOST DEAR TO ME. WITHOUT THEM, I NO LONGER WISH TO LIVE. YET I AM A DAUGHTER OF THE TALVELAI, AND A WARRIOR, AND I WOULD DIE IN BATTLE. O SEDI, WILL YOU FIGHT?
I WILL.

THIS TIME IT WAS SEDI WHO SLOWED, TIRING.
NOW, SISTER-KILLER, I HAVE YOU.
YOU ARE TOO BEAUTIFUL, SEDI.
COME WITH ME.
AND SO KAI TALVELA FOLLOWED THE MOON TO HER CAVE BENEATH THE OCEAN.


...IT SEEMED TO KAI THAT NO TIME PASSED AT ALL. SHE SLEPT BY DAY, AND ROSE AT NIGHT TO RIDE WITH THE MOON ACROSS THE DARK SKY'S FACE, TO RACE THE WOLVES ACROSS THE PLAINS AND WATCH THE DOLPHINS PLAYING IN THE BURNISHED SEA.

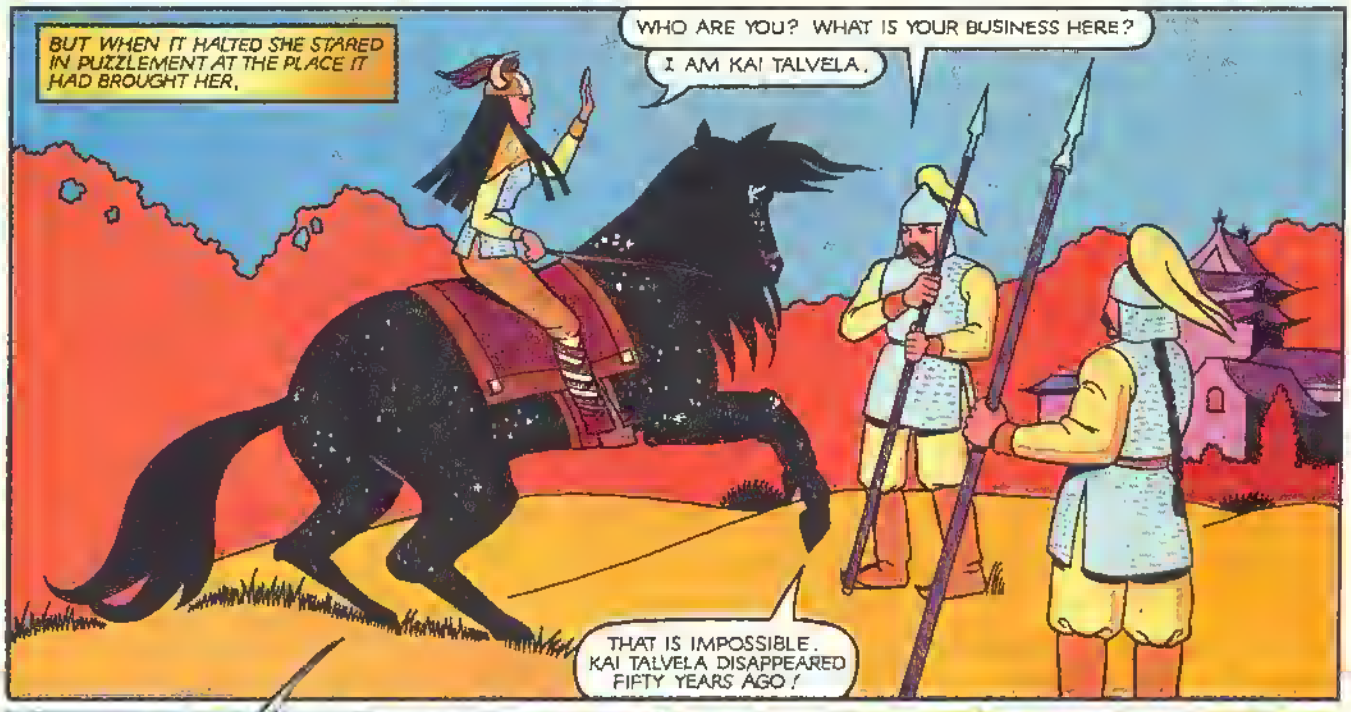
BUT ONE SLEEP SHE DREAMED OF AN OLD WOMAN STANDING BY A WINDOW, CALLING HER NAME.
THREE TIMES SHE DREAMED THAT DREAM.

AND HER MEMORIES AWOKE.
O MY LOVE, DEAR TO ME IS THE TIME I HAVE SPENT WITH YOU. YET I YEARN FOR THE COUNTRY OF MY BIRTH.
SEDI, LET ME GO TO MY PLACE.

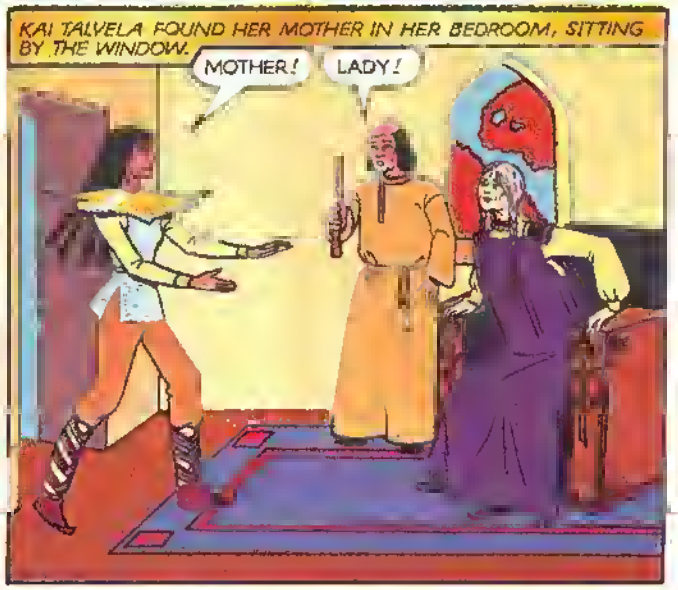
YOU MUST KNOW, KAI TALVELA, THAT MUCH HUMAN TIME HAS PASSED SINCE YOU ENTERED MY CAVE. ROKO TALVELA IS DEAD. YOUR MOTHER IS ALIVE BUT VERY OLD. THE VERY STEED THAT BROUGHT YOU HERE HAS LONG SINCE TURNED TO DUST.
I WILL WALK HOME.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DO THAT. I LOVE YOU SO WELL THAT I WILL EVEN HELP YOU LEAVE ME.
CLOTHES I WILL GIVE YOU, AND ARMOR, AND A SWORD.

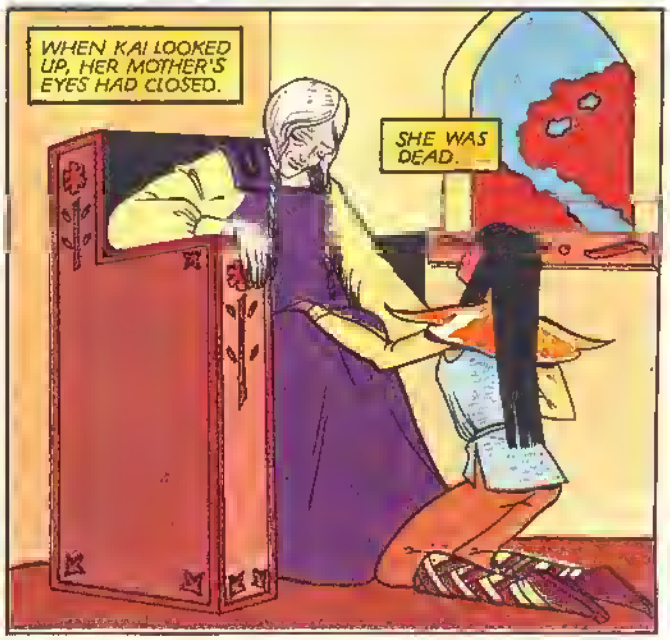
THIS STEED WILL BRING YOU TO ISSHO IN LESS THAN A DAY.
YOU HAVE NOT AGED. DO YOU WISH TO SEE ?
TAKE THIS. AND ON NIGHTS WHEN THE MOON IS FULL, DO THIS...
THE BLACK HORSE TRAVELLED SO FAST THAT KAI HAD NO CHANCE TO OBSERVE THE WAYS IN WHICH THE WORLD BENEATH HER HAD CHANGED.

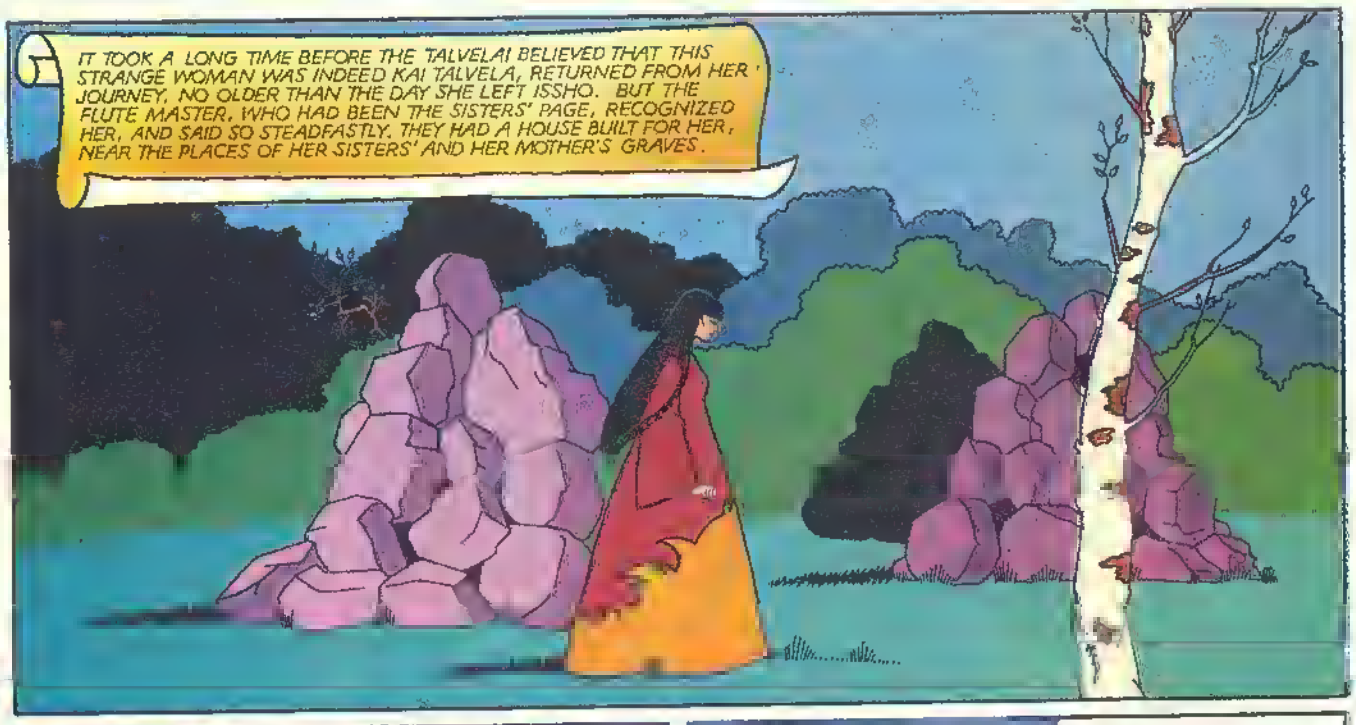

BUT WHEN IT HALTED SHE STARED IN PUZZLEMENT AT THE PLACE IT HAD BROUGHT HER.
WHO ARE YOU? WHAT IS YOUR BUSINESS HERE?
I AM KAI TALVELA.
THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE. KAI TALVELA DISAPPEARED FIFTY YEARS AGO!

I AM KAI TALVELA AND I WANT TO SEE MY MOTHER!


KAI TALVELA FOUND HER MOTHER IN HER BEDROOM, SITTING BY THE WINDOW.
MOTHER!
LADY!

I HAVE MISSED YOU. I CALLED AND CALLED. STRONG WAS THE SPELL THAT HELD YOU. WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?
IN THE CAVE OF THE MOON.
CURLED LIKE A CHILD AGAINST HER MOTHER'S KNEE, SHE TOLD THE SORCERER EVERYTHING.


WHEN KAI LOOKED UP, HER MOTHER'S EYES HAD CLOSED.
SHE WAS DEAD.


IT TOOK A LONG TIME BEFORE THE TALVELAI BELIEVED THAT THIS STRANGE WOMAN WAS INDEED KAI TALVELA, RETURNED FROM HER JOURNEY, NO OLDER THAN THE DAY SHE LEFT ISSHO. BUT THE FLUTE MASTER, WHO HAD BEEN THE SISTERS' PAGE, RECOGNIZED HER, AND SAID SO STEADFASTLY. THEY HAD A HOUSE BUILT FOR HER, NEAR THE PLACES OF HER SISTERS' AND HER MOTHER'S GRAVES.

SOMETIMES THE OLD MUSICIAN CAME TO VISIT HER. HE ALONE KNEW WHERE SHE HAD BEEN FOR FIFTY YEARS.

IN THE AUTUMN AFTER HER RETURN THE OLD MUSICIAN DIED.
I SHOULD NOT HAVE COME HOME. I SHOULD HAVE STAYED WITH SEDI.

SUDDENLY SHE RECALLED SEDI'S HANDS CUPPED AROUND A MIRROR.

SHE SAID THE WORDS SEDI HAD TOLD HER TO SAY

HAVE YOU MISSED ME?
THAT NIGHT, KAI'S BED WAS WARM. BUT AT DAWN SEDI LEFT.
WILL YOU COME BACK?
I WILL COME WHEN YOU CALL ME.
EVERY MONTH ON THE NIGHT OF THE FULL MOON KAI HELD THE MIRROR TO THE LIGHT, AND SAID THE WORDS.
AND EVERY MONTH SEDI RETURNED.
BUT ELEMENTALS ARE FICKLE, AND THEY ARE NOT HUMAN, THOUGH THEY TAKE HUMAN SHAPE. ONE NIGHT SEDI DID NOT COME. KAI WAITED LONG HOURS BY THE WINDOW. YEARS HAD PASSED. SHE WAS NO LONGER THE WOMAN OF TWENTY WHO HAD EMERGED LIKE A BUTTERFLY FROM THE MOON'S CAVE.
YET SHE WAS STILL BEAUTIFUL, AND HER SPIRIT WAS AS STRONG AS IT HAD EVER BEEN. WHEN AT LAST THE SUNLIGHT CAME, SHE PICKED UP THE MIRROR AND BROKE IT OVER HER KNEE.

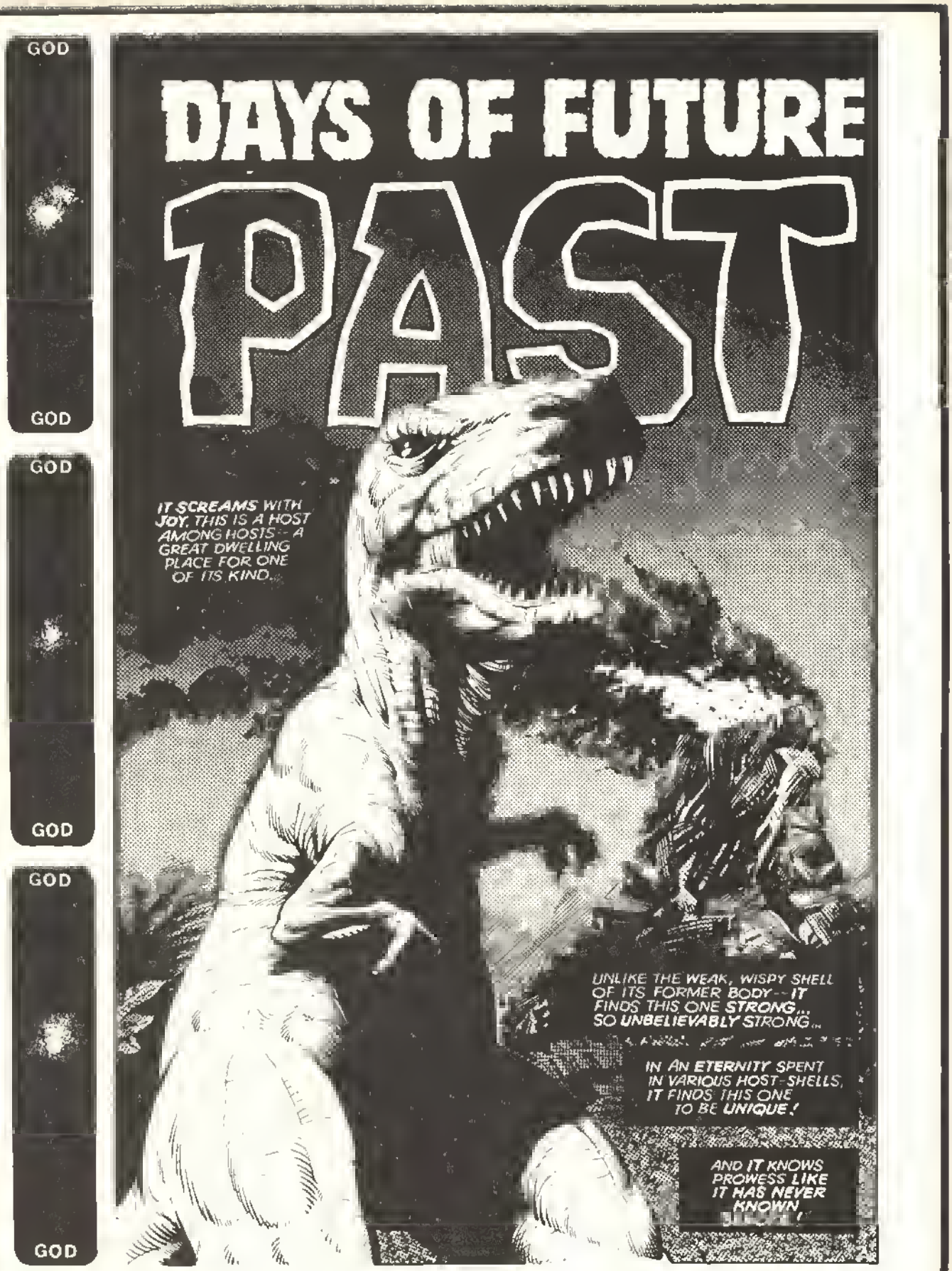
IT SEEMED TO THE TALVELAI THEN THAT SHE GREW OLD SWIFTLY, AGING A YEAR IN THE SPACE OF A DAY. BUT HER BACK DID NOT BEND, NOR HER HAIR WHITEN. SHE DIED ON THE NIGHT OF THE FULL MOON, IN SPRING. AT DAWN SOME OF HER VIGOR RETURNED, AND SHE INSISTED THAT HER ATTENDANTS CARRY HER TO THE WINDOW...
SEDI!
... AND DRESS HER IN RED SILK, AND LAY A SWORD ACROSS HER LAP. SHE WORE AROUND HER NECK A PIECE OF BROKEN MIRROR ON A SILVER CHAIN.
THEY BURIED KAI TALVELA BESIDE HER MOTHER AND SISTERS, AND THEN FORGOT ABOUT HER. FICKLENESS IS ALSO A HUMAN TRAIT.
BUT SOME YEARS LATER THERE WAS WAR IN ISSHO. THE SOLDIERS OF THE TALVELAI WERE OUTNUMBERED. THEIR ENEMIES BACKED THEM AS FAR AS THE MANOR GATE. SUDDENLY A WOMAN IN BRIGHT ARMOR RODE FROM OUT OF NOWHERE.
TALVELA SOLDIERS, FOLLOW ME!
AT HER INDOMITABLE MANNER, THE ENEMY WAS STRUCK WITH TERROR. THEY DROPPED THEIR SWORDS AND FLED. THAT WAS THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF KAI TALVELA'S SHADE.
SOMETIMES SHE COMES UNARMORED, DRESSED IN RED SILK, GLIDING THROUGH THE HALLS OF THE ISSHO ESTATE. WHEN SHE COMES IN THIS GUISE SHE WEARS A PENDANT: A BROKEN MIRROR ON A SILVER CHAIN. IN THE FARMS AND CITIES THEY CALL HER THE MIRROR GHOST, BUT THE FOLK OF THE ESTATE KNOW HER BY NAME. SHE IS KAI TALVELA, THE WARRIOR WOMAN OF ISSHO, WHO LOVED AND FOUGHT THE MOON, AND WAS LOVED BY HER IN RETURN.
THE DAUGHTERS OF THE TALVELAI NEVER TIRE OF THE STORY. THEY ASK FOR IT AGAIN AND AGAIN.

Tribute

GENE DAY

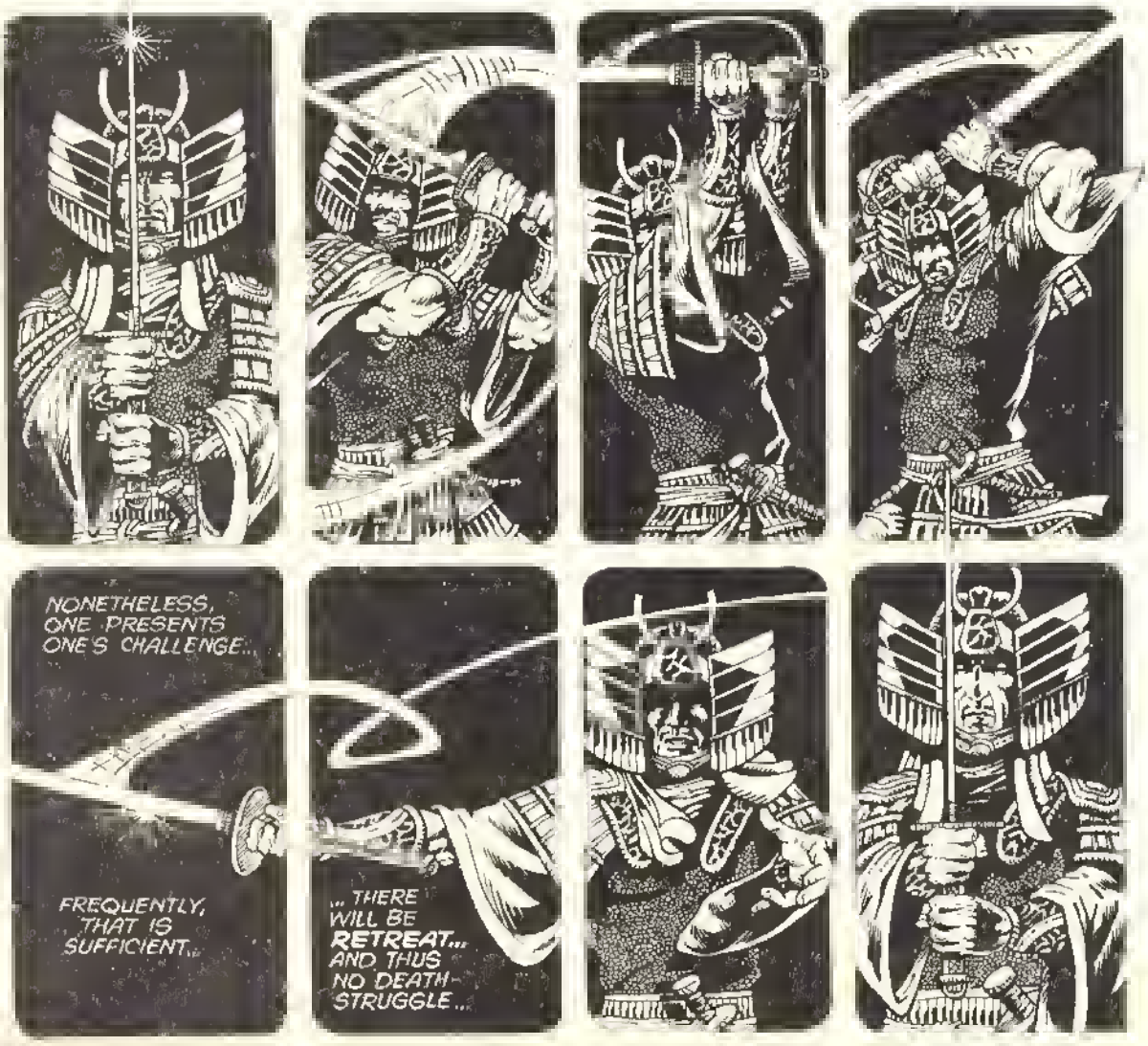
1951-1982

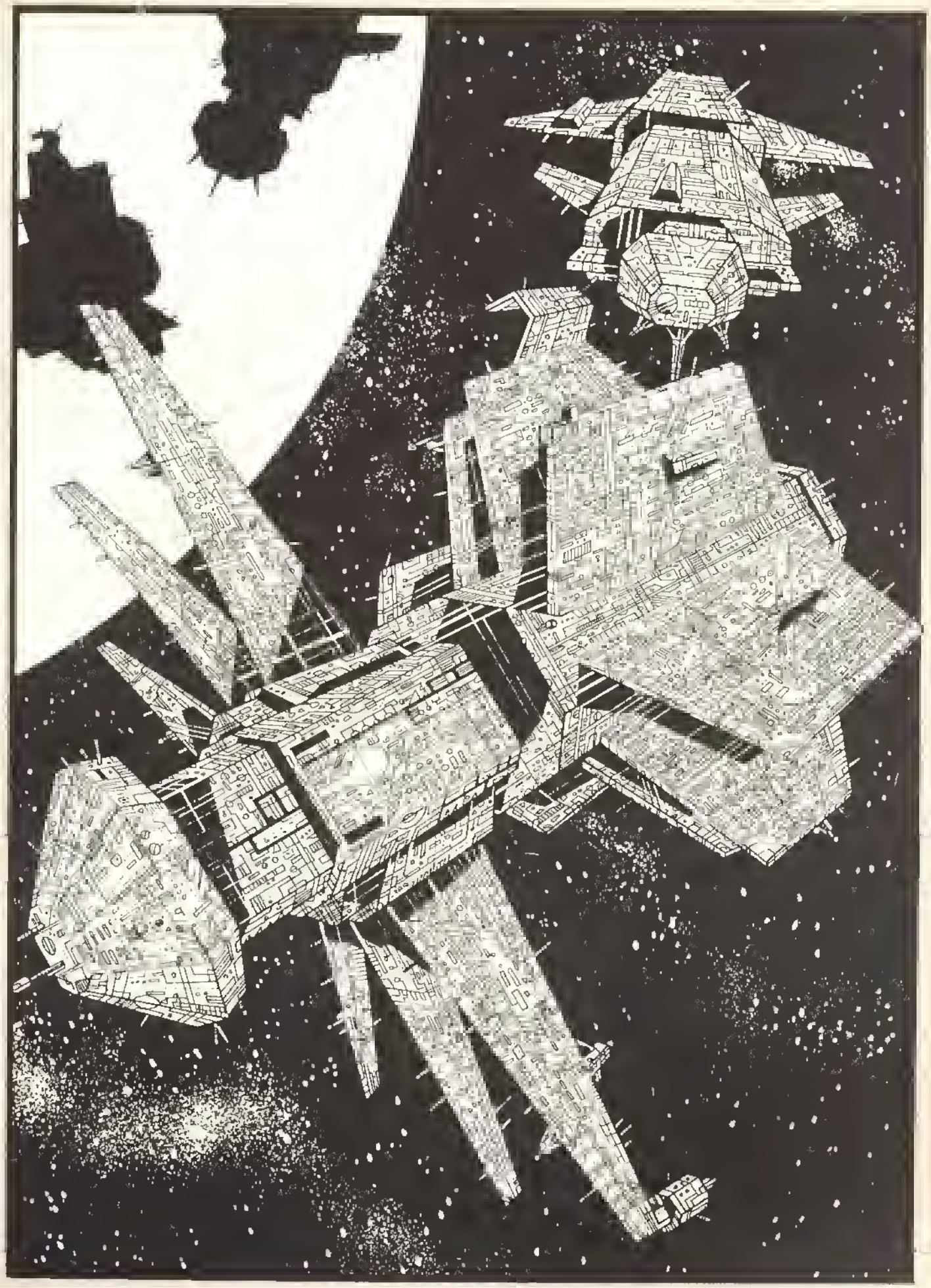
by Archie Goodwin


GOD
GOD
GOD
GOD
GOD
GOD
DAYS OF FUTURE
PAST
IT SCREAMS WITH JOY. THIS IS A HOST AMONG HOSTS -- A GREAT DWELLING PLACE FOR ONE OF ITS KIND...
UNLIKE THE WEAK, WISPY SHELL OF ITS FORMER BODY -- IT FINDS THIS ONE STRONG... SO UNBELIEVABLY STRONG...
IN AN ETERNITY SPENT IN VARIOUS HOST-SHELLS, IT FINDS THIS ONE TO BE UNIQUE!
AND IT KNOWS PROWESS LIKE IT HAS NEVER KNOWN!

This year has been a brutal one for lovers of the art of comics. It contained the deaths of such talent as Hal Foster, Wallace Wood, Reed Crandall, and Russ Manning to name just a few. In October, Gene Day, perhaps best known for his recent work as resident artist on Marvel's *Master of Kung Fu* comic, died suddenly in his sleep of a heart attack. He was thirty-one years old. Unlike the other artists named, Gene had not yet reached his full stature in the field. His art, already unique and impressive, was still growing. Hopefully then, what these pages will show is not just the variety and accomplishment of Gene Day's artwork, but the promise as well.

Born in Gananoque, Ontario, Canada, where he continued to live and work, Gene, a self-taught artist and writer, began working professionally in 1974. Though he contributed to mainstream publications, much of his earlier work was for independently produced books such as *Orb*, *Star Reach*, and his own magazine, *Dark Fantasy*. Though his drawing would later grow more accomplished, most of this early work ably reflects two of Gene's strongest points; his powerful and dramatic use of blacks in his rendering, and his constant experimentation with page design and story-telling breakdowns. Since Gene was doing his own writing in most of these pieces, he was able to play to these strengths with particular effectiveness.





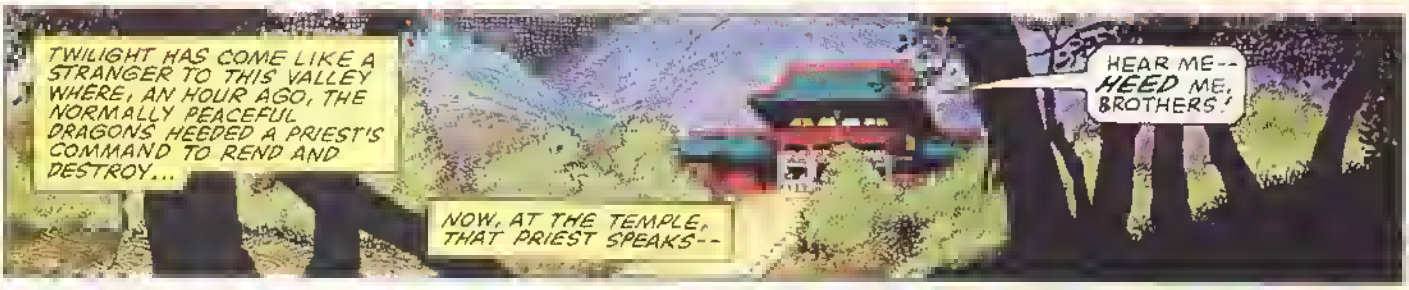
The illustrations used in these pages come from a variety of sources. The piper on the opening page is from the splash panel of Gene's last issue of *Master of Kung Fu*. *Days of Future Past* originally appeared in *Star Reach* as did *Samurai* (pages 62 and 66) and *There's Banging up in Bangor* (shown on page 63). *Gauntlet* (page 61) and *Black Legion* (page 65) are included in the *Future Day* collection. The interpretation of the scene from *Rogues in the House* (page 64) can be found in *All Things Dark and Dangerous*. They are only a small part of a large body of work for one so young. We'll never know what else Gene Day might have given us. We can only be grateful for what there already is.

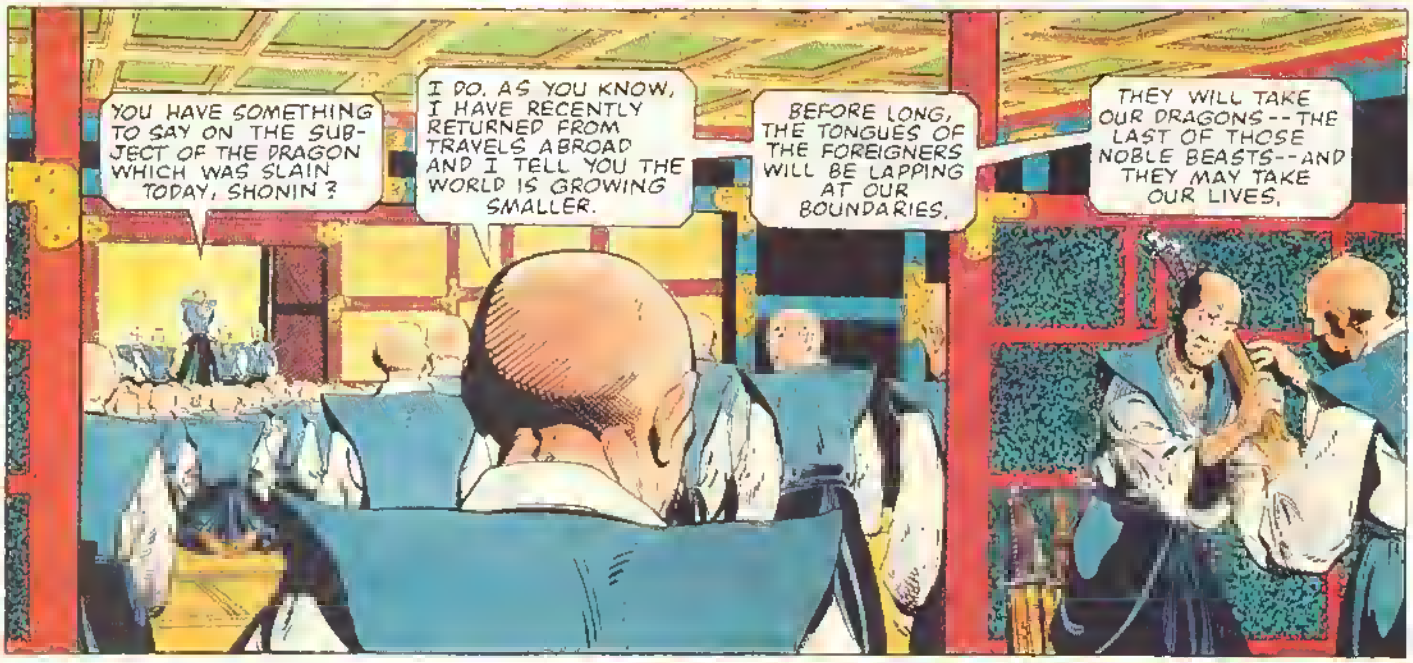
Illustration on page 61 ©1982 Marvel Comics Group;
all other illustrations are copyrighted to the artist, Gene Day.

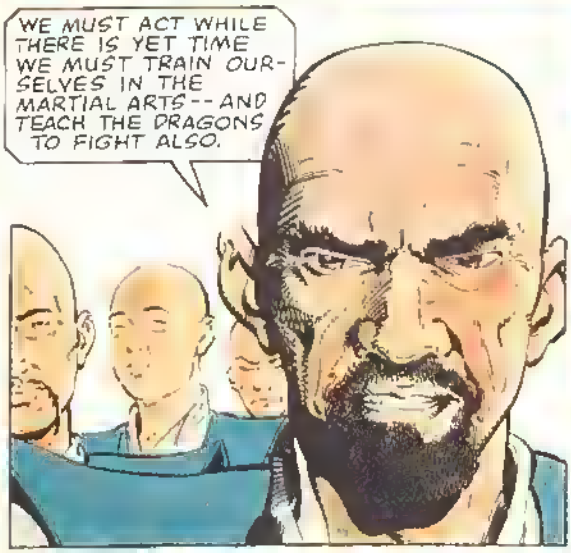
CHAPTER TWO:
THE VISION

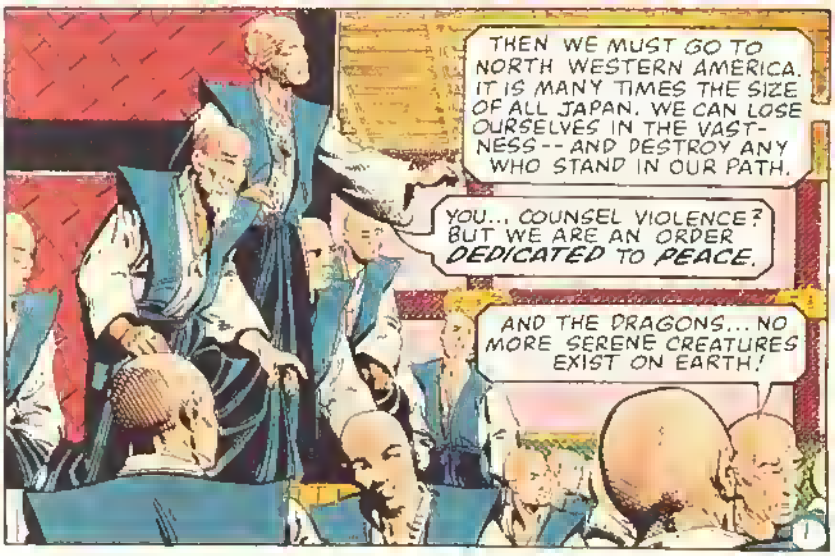
Last of the Dragons

CREATED & PLOTTED BY CARL POTTS
ART BY CARL POTTS & TERRY AUSTIN
SCRIPT BY DENNY O'NEIL
COLORS BY MARIE SEVERIN
LETTERS BY JIM NOVAK



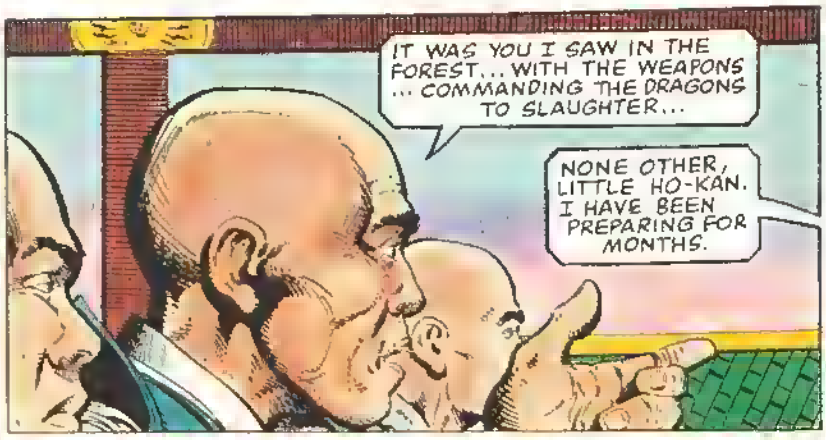




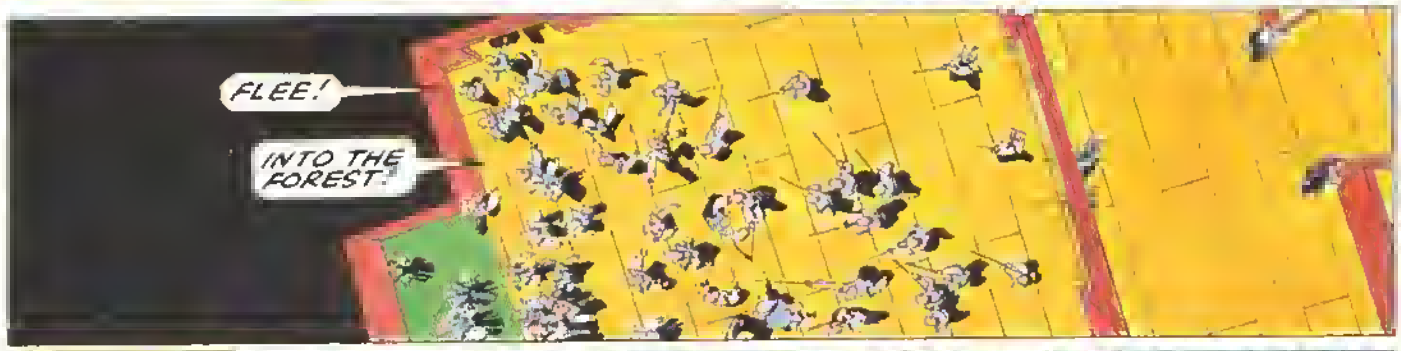


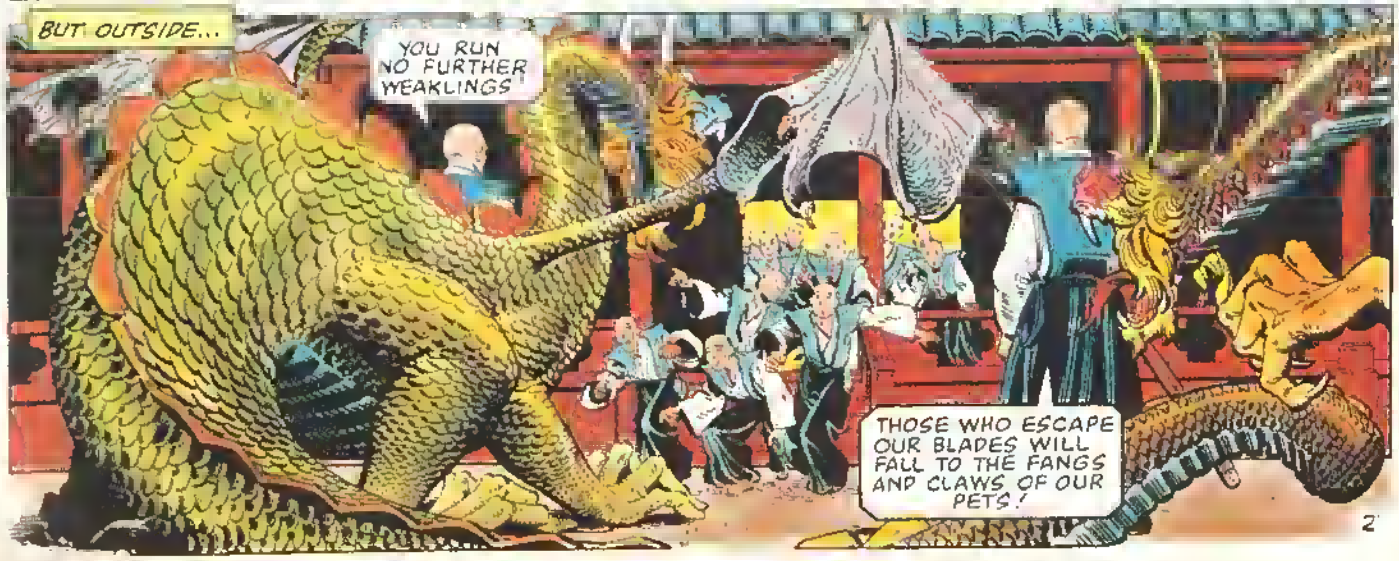
©1982 Carl Potts

THEY CAN BE TAUGHT THE CRAFTS OF WAR, BROTHERS -- BELIEVE IT. AND AS FOR US --
-- SOME OF US HAVE ALREADY LEARNED THEM.
I OFFER YOU CHOICE -- JOIN ME OR JOIN YOUR ANCESTORS.

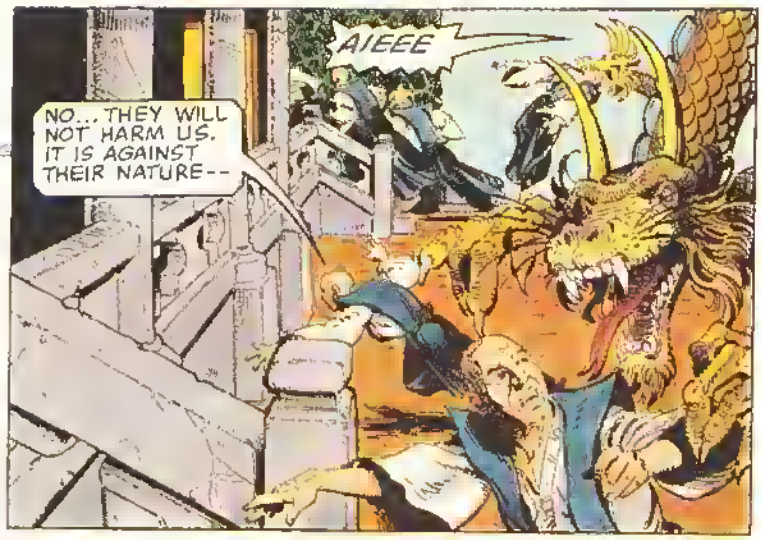

IT WAS YOU I SAW IN THE FOREST... WITH THE WEAPONS ... COMMANDING THE DRAGONS TO SLAUGHTER...
NONE OTHER, LITTLE HO-KAN. I HAVE BEEN PREPARING FOR MONTHS.

A TENSE AND SILENT MINUTE PASSES. THEN...
I HAVE WAITED LONG ENOUGH FOR YOUR ANSWER.
ATTACK!

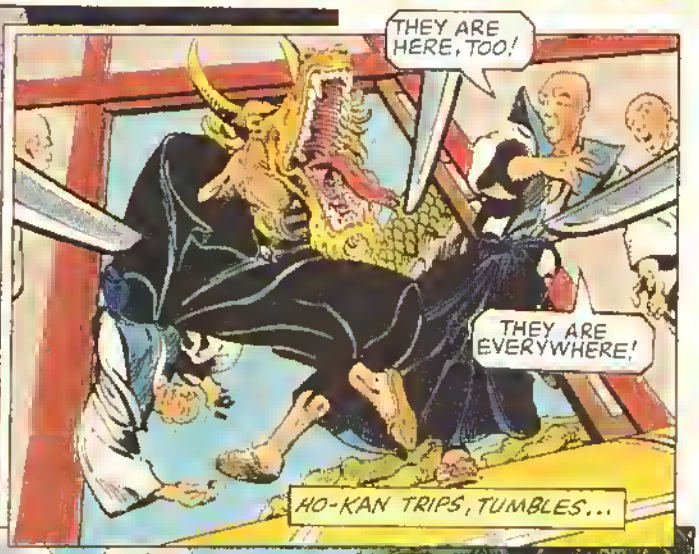

FLEE!
INTO THE FOREST!


BUT OUTSIDE...
YOU RUN NO FURTHER WEAKLINGS!
THOSE WHO ESCAPE OUR BLADES WILL FALL TO THE FANGS AND CLAWS OF OUR PETS!

SLAY THEM! SLAY EVERY ONE OF THEM!

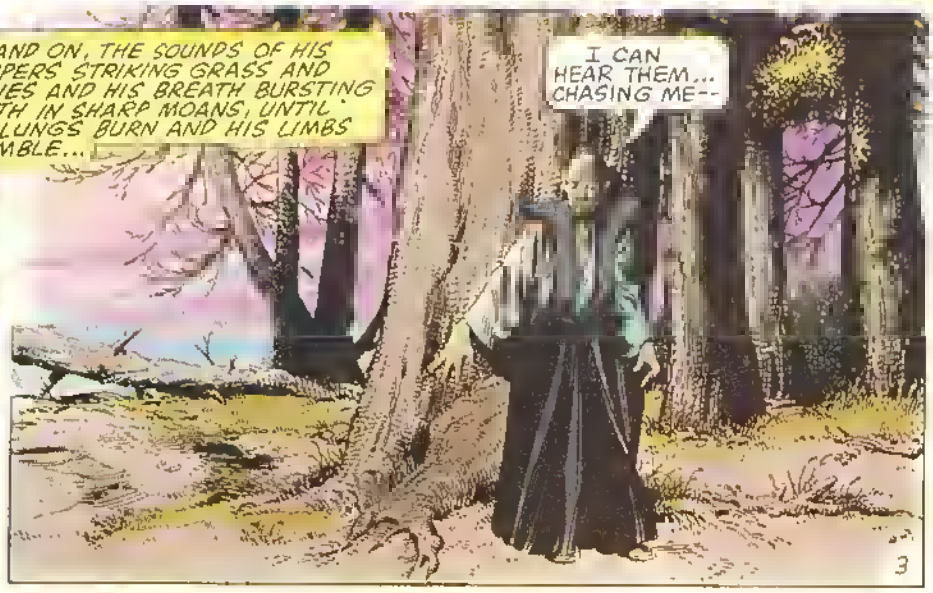

AIEEE
NO... THEY WILL NOT HARM US. IT IS AGAINST THEIR NATURE--

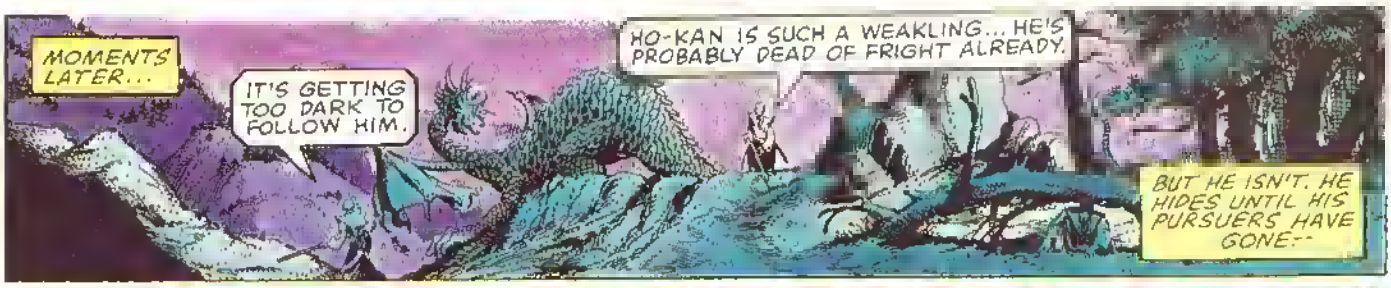
FOLLOW ME, HO-KAN! WE CAN HIDE IN THE MEDITATION HALL!
THIS... CANNOT BE HAPPENING...


THEY ARE HERE, TOO!
THEY ARE EVERYWHERE!
HO-KAN TRIPS, TUMBLES...

LUCK AND PANIC PROPELS HIM PAST THE LONE DRAGON GUARDING THE EXIT.
MUST... GET AWAY--

WITH THE SCREAMS OF HIS FRIENDS LACERATING HIS SOUL, HO-KAN REELS INTO THE SHADOWS--


ON AND ON, THE SOUNDS OF HIS SLIPPERS STRIKING GRASS AND LEAVES AND HIS BREATH BURSTING FORTH IN SHARP MOANS, UNTIL HIS LUNGS BURN AND HIS LIMBS TREMBLE...
I CAN HEAR THEM... CHASING ME--


MOMENTS LATER...
IT'S GETTING TOO DARK TO FOLLOW HIM.
HO-KAN IS SUCH A WEAKLING... HE'S PROBABLY DEAD OF FRIGHT ALREADY.
BUT HE ISN'T. HE HIDES UNTIL HIS PURSUERS HAVE GONE--

... THEN HE SCRABBLES IN THE DIRT, UNCOVERING A BOX HE BURIED AFTER RETURNING FROM A FUNERAL... HIS TREASURE--

--THE EYELID SCALE OF A WHITE DRAGON... RAREST OF THE RARE, POSSESSED OF MYSTIC POWERS-- THE GIFT OF HIS MENTOR AND ONLY FRIEND--

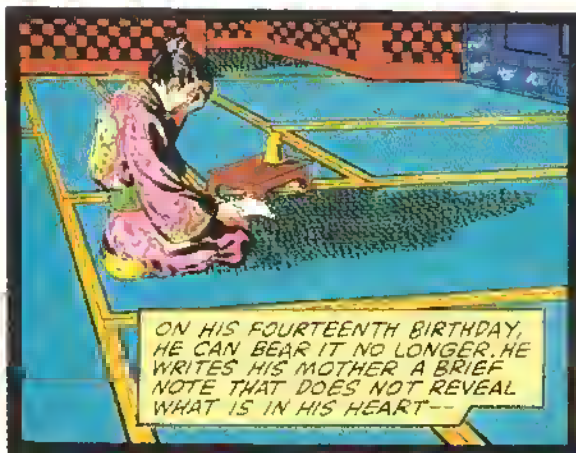
KASHO... BEFORE HE DIED, HE FORESAW TROUBLE IN MY FUTURE--

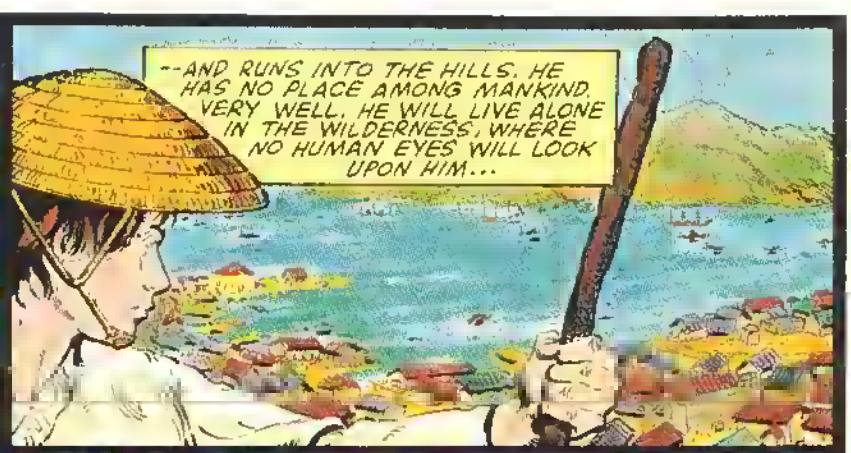
--SAID TO BURN THE SCALE--

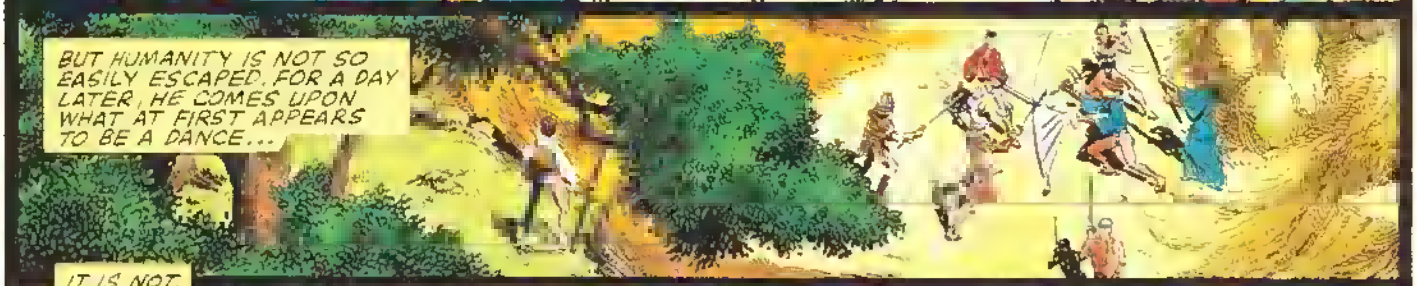
--AND MEDITATE... THINK ON MY PROBLEMS... BREATHE IN THE VAPORS RISING FROM THE FLAMES...
...LET THE SKY AND THE FOREST DISSOLVE INTO THE ETERNAL AND TIME EBB AND FLOW AND LEAVE THE TEN THOUSAND THINGS UPON THE MIND OF MEN...

THE PAST... THE FUTURE... AN ANSWER TO MY QUESTIONS...

IN THESE VISIONS, THE SOLUTION I SEEK--
NAGASAKI, THE ONLY PORT IN JAPAN THAT WELCOMES FOREIGN SHIPS AND THEIR CREWS... EIGHT YEARS AGO...
...A MOTHER AND HER SON, SINGING, HAPPY...
THEN... DISCORD--
H'LO, WIFEY! I'M BACK FROM MY VOYAGING... AS IF YOU CARE...
I GREET YOU, MY HUSBAND.
YOU BETTER. I OWN YOU! I BOUGHT YOU FROM YOUR LOW LIFE PARENTS!
AN' HERE'S THE MONKEY... WHAT THE HELL'S YOUR NAME?
TAKASHI.
TAK'SHI THE HALF BREED MONKEY...
WORDS THAT STING BECAUSE THEY ARE TRUE... SHUNNED BY JAPANESE AND GANGI ALIKE, HE WANDERS, A STRANGER ON THE EARTH, AND IN PAIN...


ON HIS FOURTEENTH BIRTHDAY, HE CAN BEAR IT NO LONGER. HE WRITES HIS MOTHER A BRIEF NOTE THAT DOES NOT REVEAL WHAT IS IN HIS HEART--


--AND RUNS INTO THE HILLS. HE HAS NO PLACE AMONG MANKIND. VERY WELL. HE WILL LIVE ALONE IN THE WILDERNESS, WHERE NO HUMAN EYES WILL LOOK UPON HIM...


BUT HUMANITY IS NOT SO EASILY ESCAPED. FOR A DAY LATER, HE COMES UPON WHAT AT FIRST APPEARS TO BE A DANCE...

IT IS NOT.
FOOLS! DON'T YOU REALIZE WE ARE NINJA?
WE REALIZE YOU HAVE MONEY AND CLOTHING WE CAN USE.
AND A YOUNG FEMALE... WE HAVE A USE FOR HER, TOO!

HE IS SKILLED, THIS NINJA, AND THE KUSARI-GAMA SEEMS TO BE ALIVE IN HIS FINGERS--
--THE CHAIN ENTANGLING ONE OF THE BANDITS--

KRAK!
--SNAPPING HIS NECK, WHILE THE SICKLE BITES INTO THE FLESH OF A SECOND.

BUT EVEN THE GREATEST SKILL HAS LIMITS. THE NINJA TRIES THE MOVE AGAIN--

--AND ALTHOUGH HE SLAYS A FOURTH FOE, A FIFTH PLUNGES A SWORD THROUGH HIM.

NOW THERE IS ONLY THE GIRL...

BITCH! YOU AND YOUR BROTHER DID ME A FAVOR, KILLING MY FRIENDS... I DON'T HAVE TO SHARE THE LOOT WITH ANYONE.
I DON'T HAVE TO SHARE YOU, EITHER.
GO ON... SQUIRM... BEG--
PIG!
NO? YOU'LL MOAN BEFORE I'M DO--
HNNNGH
CHUNK!
AN HOUR LATER--
MY FAMILY WILL BE GRATEFUL TO YOU... AT LEAST TO THE EXTENT OF GIVING YOU FOOD AND A PLACE TO SLEEP.
THEN, PERHAPS, MY FATHER WILL MAKE YOU AN OFFER.
WE ARE IN YOUR DEBT.
YOU MAY JOIN OUR CLAN, IF YOU LIKE--A CLAN OF THE IGA NINJA.
YOU WILL LEARN MUCH AND YOU WILL SUFFER MUCH. SOMETIMES THEY ARE THE SAME THING.
AND YOU WILL ALWAYS HAVE A HOME.
I ACCEPT.
HE LEARNS... PREPARATIONS OF HERBS TO CURE OR KILL--
--THE VARIOUS FORMS OF COMBAT--
--AND HE SUFFERS...
THE AGONY YOU FEEL NOW IS OF GREAT VALUE, TAK. IT TEACHES YOU ENDURANCE.
HAVE YOU ANY QUESTIONS?
YES.
WHY... DID I KILL THAT BANDIT?

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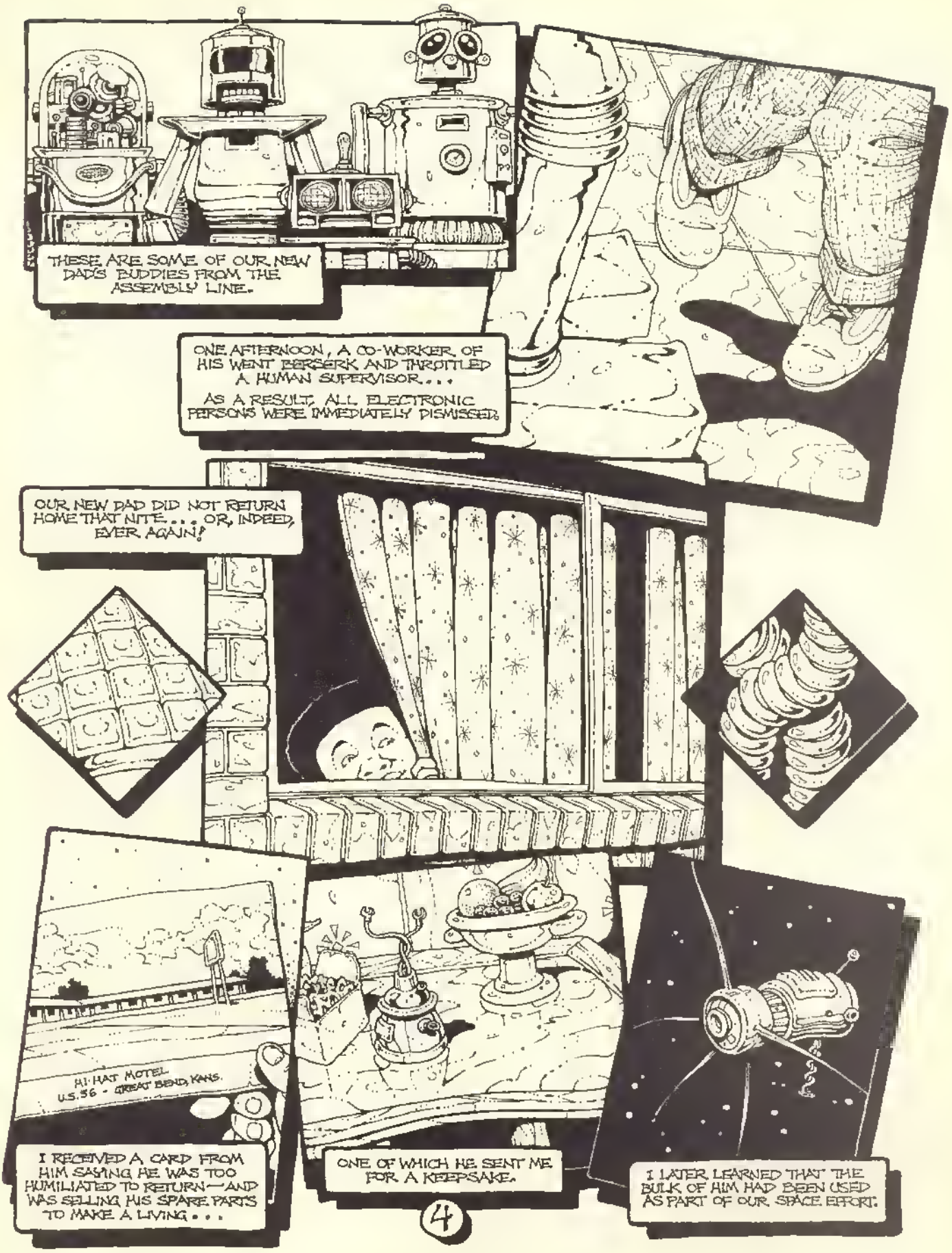
AT FIRST, BUD'S DUTIES WERE SIMPLY LIGHT HOUSEKEEPING...
PROVIDING CLORETTE AND ME WITH VIDEO ENTERTAINMENT AND SOFT DRINKS...
AND PROTECTING THE HOUSE WITH INFARED SCAN AND ALARM SYSTEM.
AS DAD STAYED AWAY FROM HOME FOR LONGER PERIODS, HE PLACED OVER BUD'S HEAD A MOLDED RUBBER REPLICA OF HIS OWN FACE!
IN SHORT ORDER, BUD BECAME AS ONE OF THE FAMILY.
NONE OF US REALLY NOTICED THAT DAD STOPPED COMING BACK HOME.
2

SO BUD BECAME OUR NEW DAD: HE FOUND A POSITION ON THE ASSEMBLY LINE OF THIS AUTO PLANT.
AND, BEING A MACHINE, HE WAS NEVER TIRED AT THE END OF THE DAY!
ONCE WHEN OUR PUP WAS RUN OVER, HE BUILT US A NEW ONE.
HERE WE ARE AT THE MALL...
AND AT THE MOVIES.


THESE ARE SOME OF OUR NEW DAD'S BUDDIES FROM THE ASSEMBLY LINE.
ONE AFTERNOON, A CO-WORKER OF HIS WENT BERSERK AND THROTTLED A HUMAN SUPERVISOR...
AS A RESULT, ALL ELECTRONIC PERSONS WERE IMMEDIATELY DISMISSED.
OUR NEW DAD DID NOT RETURN HOME THAT NITE... OR, INDEED, EVER AGAIN!
HI-HAT MOTEL
U.S. 56 - GREAT BEND, KANS.
I RECEIVED A CARD FROM HIM SAYING HE WAS TOO HUMILIATED TO RETURN—AND WAS SELLING HIS SPARE PARTS TO MAKE A LIVING...
ONE OF WHICH HE SENT ME FOR A KEEPSAKE.
I LATER LEARNED THAT THE BULK OF HIM HAD BEEN USED AS PART OF OUR SPACE EFFORT.
4

JACK: TWO SISTERS
©82 C.VESS
THE BLINDING FLASH OF LIGHT PUTS AN ABRUPT END TO THE INNKEEPER'S BILL COLLECTING...
AND JACK IS CARRIED FAR FROM THE TAVERN AND HIS TROUBLES THERE.
I AM THE WITCH ELISE, AND I BID YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS WELCOME.

LATER, AS THE WITCH SLEEPS, JACK SLIPS INTO HIS CLOTHES.

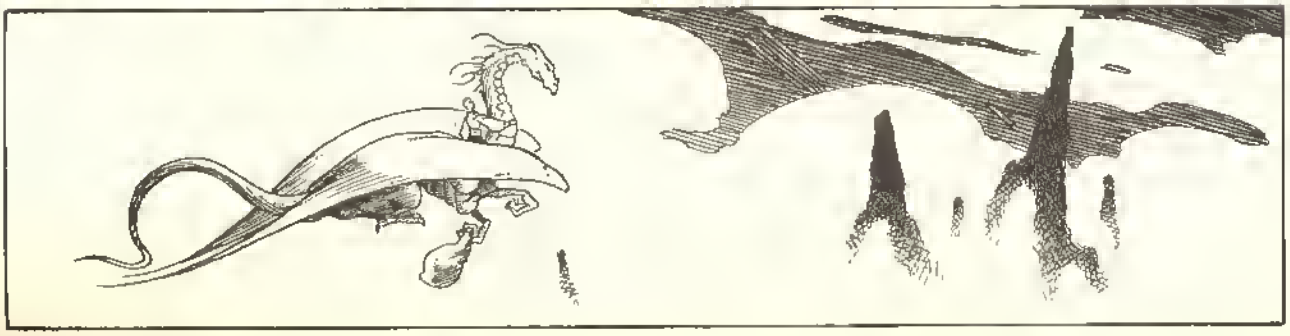
DEAREST JACK... YOU WOULDN'T LEAVE ME NOW, WOULD YOU?

OF... OF COURSE NOT!

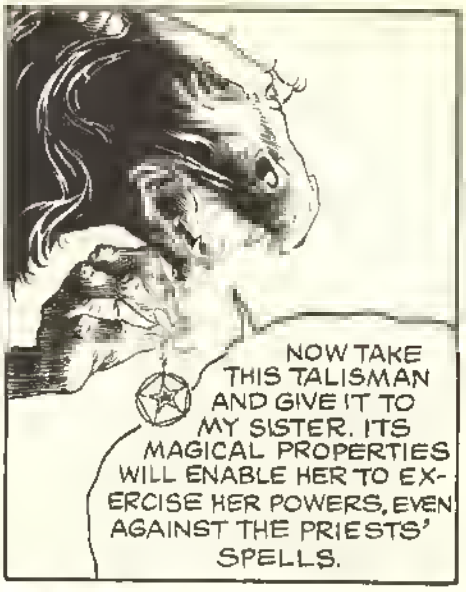
AH, YES... HERE ARE YOUR LITTLE FRIENDS!

THEY SEEM UPSET! PERHAPS I CAN QUIET THEM.
AND SHE QUICKLY SLIPPED THEM INTO A BAG SHE HAD JUST FOR THIS PURPOSE.

NOW... WOULD YOU CARE TO GO FOR A RIDE?
YOUR SERVANT MADAM.



THERE, AT THE TOP IS THE MERCHANT'S BEDCHAMBER... MY SISTER IS KEPT THERE.


NOW TAKE THIS TALISMAN AND GIVE IT TO MY SISTER. ITS MAGICAL PROPERTIES WILL ENABLE HER TO EXERCISE HER POWERS, EVEN AGAINST THE PRIESTS' SPELLS.

I WILL HOLD YOUR FRIENDS HERE FOR YOU ... SO RETURN SOON.
YES.

THIS PLACE IS GLOOMIER THAN THE BLACK GOD'S TEMPLE.

BUT THAT PLEASURE IS POSTPONED BY A CONVENIENT FLOWER POT FROM BEHIND.

AND FROM THE WOMAN'S LIPS A HIGH-PITCHED HUMMING SOUND COMES... FILLING THE CHAMBER. THEN THE POWER OF THE TALISMAN...

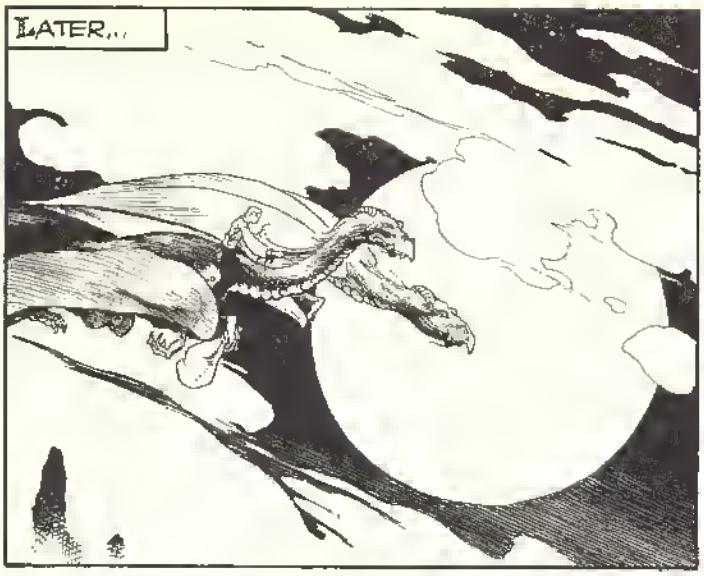
EFFECTS A TRANSFORMATION IN THE YOUNG WITCH.

THANK YOU, YOUNG FRIEND... IS MY SISTER WAITING OUTSIDE?
YES!

THEN GO TO HER... I HAVE BUSINESS TO FINISH HERE.

AS JACK LEAVES, THE MERCHANT MOMENTARILY REVIVES...
NO... NOO... NOOO...

GGGGGG


LATER...

WELL, I THANK YOU, JACK... HERE ARE YOUR FRIENDS, AS I PROMISED.

GREETINGS.

YOU ALSO SPOKE OF A BAG OF GOLD.

YES...

THE *NEXT* TIME REMIND ME TO BARGAIN MORE *CAREFULLY* WITH WITCHES... WE HAVE OUR *GOLD*, BUT HOW DO WE GET DOWN FROM HERE TO *SPEND* IT?!

HEY—WE NEED SOME HELP DOWN HERE!
UH...
PLEASE — WHOEVER YOU ARE...

HURRY!
YOU'RE HURTING MY...
...YOU—YOU LOOK LIKE SOMEONE...

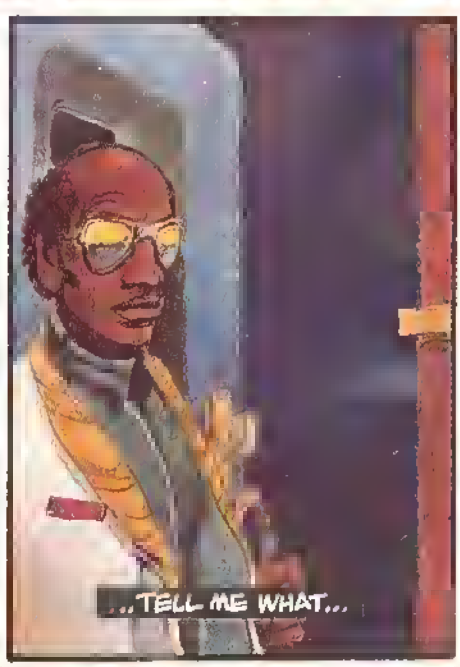
OKAY— TAKE IT EASY!
...I JUST...

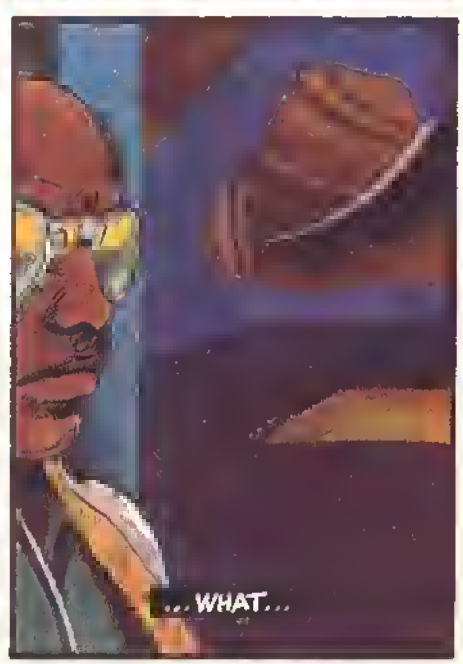
YOU JUST NOTHIN'!

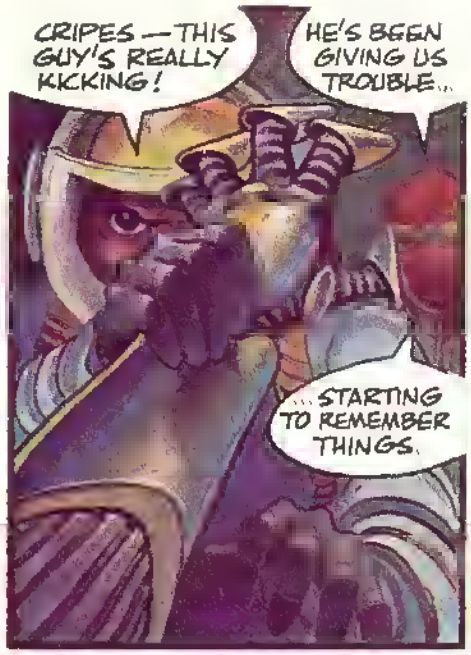
NOW, JUST LEAVE THE LADY ALONE...

...AN' START WALKIN' TOWARDS THAT DOOR.

THAT'S IT.
PLEASE...


...TELL ME WHAT...

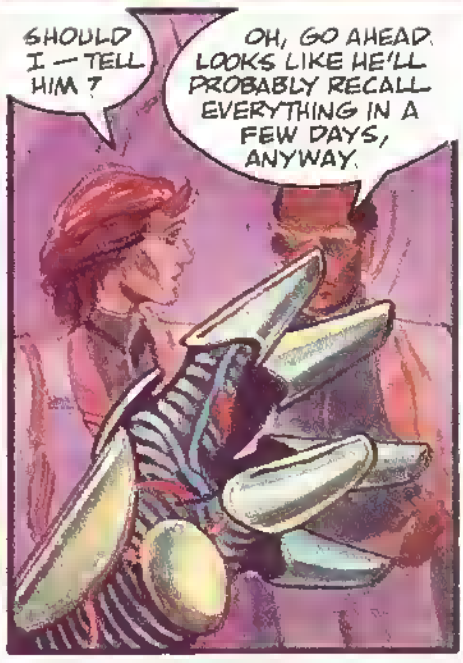

...WHAT...


CRIPES — THIS GUY'S REALLY KICKING!
HE'S BEEN GIVING US TROUBLE...
...STARTING TO REMEMBER THINGS.

KARIN HAD TO MENTION HIS FAMILY...
I CAN'T HOLD HIM!
FAMILY...

ANDY! HELP HIM OUT!
WAIT — PLEASE! I-I'LL DO ANYTHING! I JUST — HAVE TO KNOW...

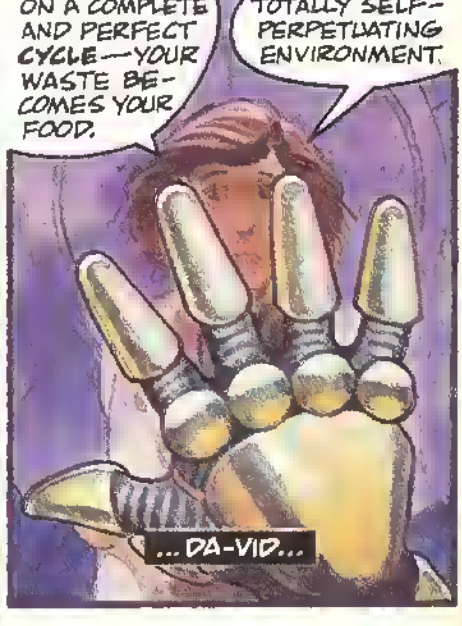
...WHO I AM — WHAT THIS SUIT... WHAT...

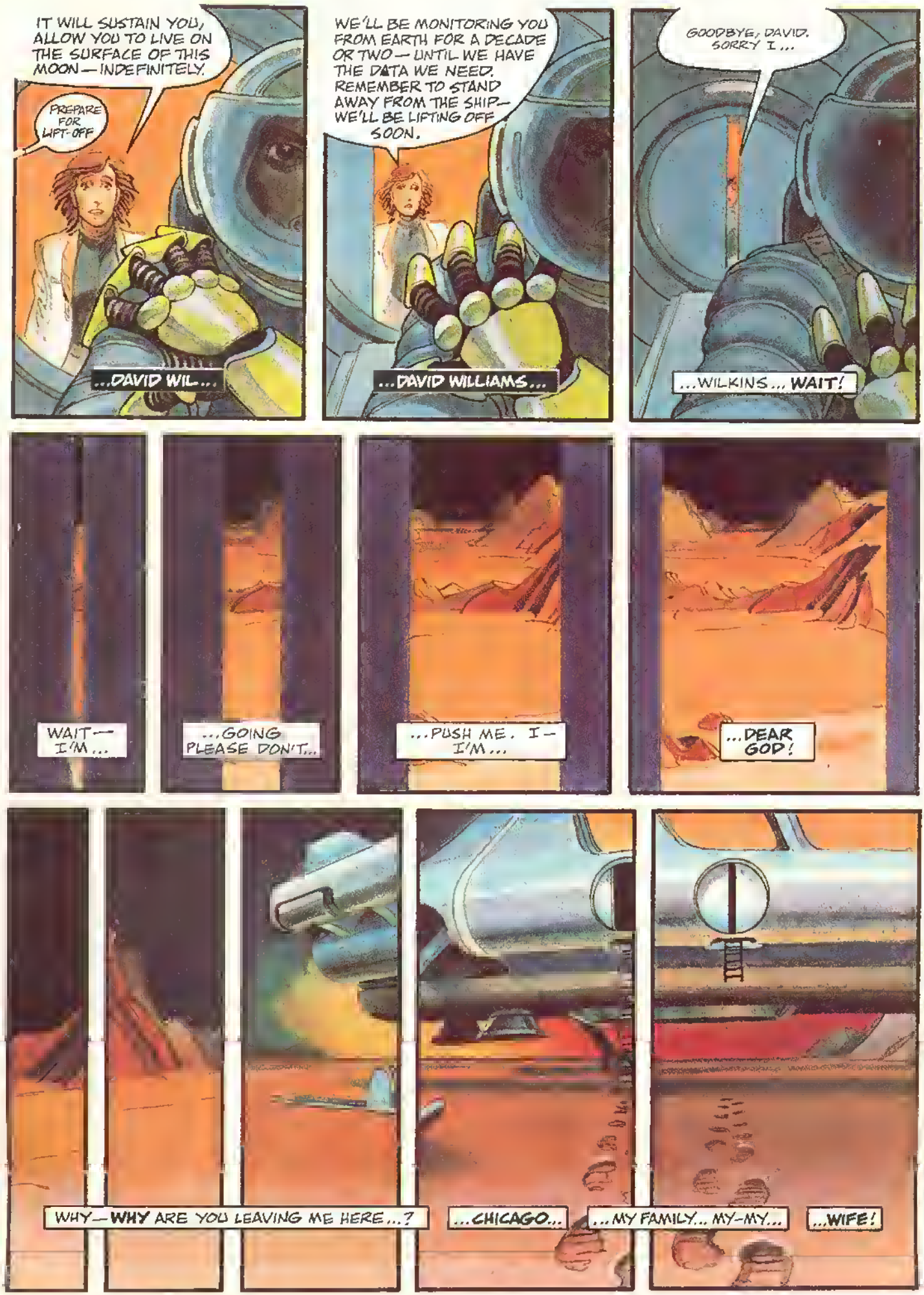

SHOULD I — TELL HIM?
OH, GO AHEAD. LOOKS LIKE HE'LL PROBABLY RECALL EVERYTHING IN A FEW DAYS, ANYWAY.

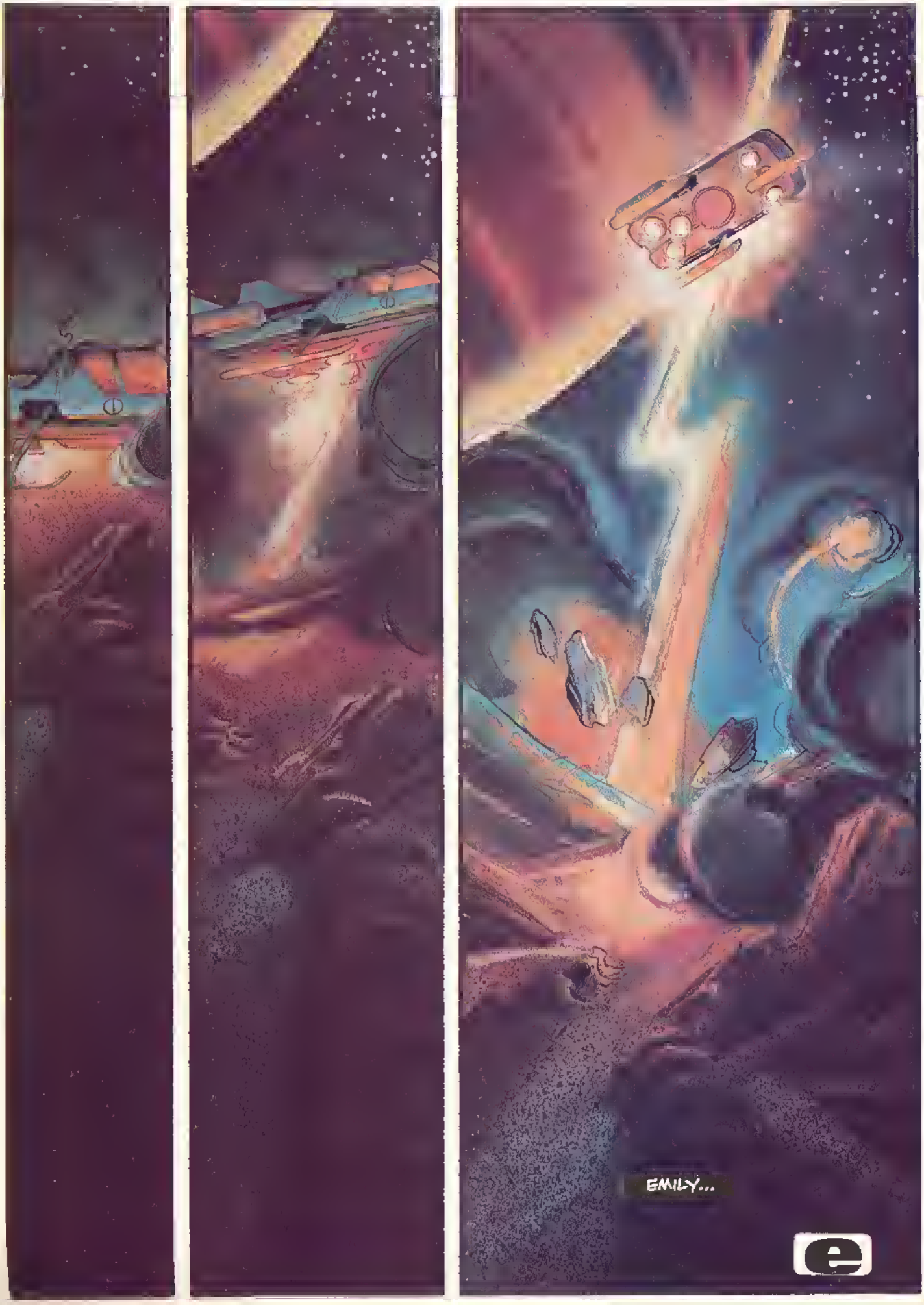
NO SKIN OFF OUR BACK — HE'LL HAVE TO LIVE WITH IT!
WHA — WH...?

IT'S JUST THAT WE — COULDN'T GET ANY VOLUNTEERS AND... WELL...
IT'S A VERY IMPORTANT MISSION, DAVID!
QUICKLY, KARIN.
DA-VID.

THE SUIT IS — WELL, IT'S A KIND OF PROTOTYPE, IT'S PART OF YOU — A PERMANENT ENCASING...
...DAVID...DAVID...


...IT WORKS ON A COMPLETE AND PERFECT CYCLE — YOUR WASTE BECOMES YOUR FOOD.
IT'S A TOTALLY SELF-PERPETUATING ENVIRONMENT.
...DA-VID...


IT WILL SUSTAIN YOU, ALLOW YOU TO LIVE ON THE SURFACE OF THIS MOON — INDEFINITELY.
PREPARE FOR LIFT-OFF
...DAVID WIL...
WE'LL BE MONITORING YOU FROM EARTH FOR A DECADE OR TWO — UNTIL WE HAVE THE DATA WE NEED. REMEMBER TO STAND AWAY FROM THE SHIP — WE'LL BE LIFTING OFF SOON.
...DAVID WILLIAMS...
GOODBYE, DAVID. SORRY I...
...WILKINS... WAIT!
WAIT — I'M...
...GOING PLEASE DON'T...
...PUSH ME. I — I'M...
...DEAR GOD!
WHY — WHY ARE YOU LEAVING ME HERE...?
...CHICAGO...
...MY FAMILY... MY-MY...
...WIFE!


EMILY...